

HOWARD KIMELDORF INTERVIEWS FOR *REDS OR RACKETS*?

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**ELMER MEVERT, TONY PRIZMICH, LEON DE PARTIE, JOHN ALBERG, AND EDWARD
THAYNE OF ILWU LOCAL 13, LOCAL 94**

INTERVIEWEE: ELMER MEVERT, TONY PRIZMICH, LEON DE PARTIE, JOHN ALBERG, AND
EDWARD THAYNE

INTERVIEWERS: HOWARD KIMELDORF

SUBJECTS: INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD; 1923 SAN PEDRO MARITIME STRIKE; KU
KLUX KLAN; HARRY BRIDGES; LONGSHORE WORKING CONDITIONS; POLICE VIOLENCE;
SCABS; WORK-STOPPAGES; *ASAMA MARU*; WORLD WAR II

LOCATION: SAN PEDRO, CALIFORNIA

DATE: APPROXIMATELY 1982

INTERVIEW LENGTH: 01:56:32

FILE NAME: EMTPLPJAET_HKOHP_1980_Audio_acc5798-001.mp3

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[00:00:00] **HOWARD KIMELDORF:** First I'm going to ask—I forget your name, Emmett?

[00:00:06] **ELMER MEVERT:** Elmer Mevert--M-E-V-E-R-T.

[00:00:08] **HOWARD:** Okay, and since I'll go through these with the rest of the fellows a little more in detail, I just—why don't you give me your impression on why you think Bridges was as durable as he was? Jump right into it there.

[00:00:24] **ELMER:** Well, my first impression is, the man was completely honest. And the guys trusted him. Even the opposition. Time and time again, Bridges was honest. I think that's the main reason. Is his complete honesty, and his resistance to corruptibility. He was incorruptible. He had been offered, from time to time, in the early days of the union, nice hunks of money, here and there from various sources. And he used to say, "Got to see the rank-and-file first."

[00:01:09] **HOWARD:** What about Bridges' politics, did that help him or hinder him? Tough question, I know.

[00:01:17] **ELMER:** At the start, I think it helped him. Because the whole country was in fervent. It's taken a very conservative view, now. But I think it definitely helped him in the beginning.

[00:01:29] **HOWARD:** What period are you talking about?

[00:01:30] **ELMER:** Oh I'd say from—well prior to the market crash, up to and including the—what would I call the—the Truman Era.

[00:01:49] **HOWARD:** So the thirties and the forties.

[00:01:51] **ELMER:** About '46, that's my impression.

[00:01:54] **HOWARD:** And what do you mean by helped him, the politics helped him?

[00:01:57] **ELMER:** Well, it appealed to the—a lot of the guys were [inaudible] _____, they had [inaudible] _____ ideas that at the time were considered radical. And even left-wing. It appealed to the younger men especially. That's my impression. And they were getting suspicious of the old establishment.

[00:02:31] **HOWARD:** What sorts of things appealed to them exactly, if you could remember? Because he talked about lots of different things, he talked about the inevitability of class conflict, he talked about certain things on foreign policy, about boycotting scrap iron. He talked about a lot of different things. I wonder if you can remember what really appealed to the men, in particular. Or was it just sort of Bridges as a package?

[00:02:56] **ELMER:** Well first it was his approach. His approach to the matter of unionism. Bridges' approach was one union. Up to the time that this union was organized, it was a very fractured union. Strictly craft all the way down the line. The old ILA [International Longshore Association] concept. The old American Federation [American Federation of Labor; AFL] concept from way back, from Samuel Gompers and so forth. Everything was based on craft. In other words, had we not prevailed, or Bridges talking to prevail to guarding this union—we had an old ILA guy in here at the time, Pedro Pete, if he had had his way, and Eddie will verify this, you would've had a winch driver's union, you'd have a dockman's union, a hallman's union—you'd have all these unions into different splintered groups. Each one of them would be a separate one. That was one of the big appeals to the men. They were sick and tired of this crafts unionism where a lot of times, one union would scab on another—that's happened. The SUP [Sailor's Union of the Pacific], the sailor's union used to scab on the longshoremen, and things of that nature.

[00:04:16] **HOWARD:** So his concept of industrial unionism, working class solidarity—

[00:04:20] **ELMER:** I think one of the main attractions is the idea of industrial unionism, rather than [?hoards of other?] unions.

[00:04:27] **HOWARD:** Now there were many people advocating that in the thirties, as you know. The CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] came out of that whole movement.

[00:04:33] **ELMER:** The CIO was the basic premise.

[00:04:35] **HOWARD:** Why Bridges then? Why did he stay around when the others didn't? I studied that period and there were 15 unions expelled from the CIO in 1950. There was the UE—remember that, the electrical workers? Half a million members? They lost almost all of them. Mine Mill [International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers] was eventually absorbed by the steelworkers.

[00:04:51] **ELMER:** Communication.

[00:04:51] **HOWARD:** Communication workers, or a whole series of smaller maritime unions—Marine Cooks and Stewards or others. Bridges was the only union, the ILWU [International Longshore and Warehouse Union] that survived without losing any members. How do you explain that?

[00:05:05] **ELMER:** Honestly? Well, the only thing I can explain that is—I've been out of the direct mainstream for a few years now—is his basic inherent honesty. He didn't double-talk, in other words. He got up on the floor and Bridges would also admit errors he had made, from time to time. And he used to get pretty deep on the international politics, that was one of the sore spots. A lot guys that was in on that. Especially the old type of Wobblies from the twenties and so forth. They did not believe in the political action; they just believed in direct action.

[00:05:51] **HOWARD:** How long were those guys around the Wobblies?

[00:05:53] **ELMER:** Bridges had a mix of old political action and economic action. He couldn't accomplish the ends without some kind of political action. And his idea of getting into international politics was to organize a worldwide support of these progressive labor movements. Worldwide.

But like I say, a lot of the old time Wobblies, they did not believe in political action. And yet, it was the Wobblies that really set the groundwork for the idea of an industrial type of union. He got a lot of his ideas from the old Wobblies. And Pete will verify that. The old Wobblies movement was a very, very basic step in this type of thinking.

[00:06:45] **HOWARD:** Bridges was actually in the Wobblies for a year or two in New Orleans [Louisiana] when he was a sailor.

Those are the only sorts of general questions that I had, now what I would like to do is to go back and go through the history of this thing, the beginning in the twenties and thirties if we can. If you want to do that. And you're free to leave whenever you can, but that's helpful—gives us a base of what we're working with. Okay?

Why don't we go around the room—start over here—and each one tell me your name, and spell it into the machine, so if I have to write it there's no problem.

[00:07:20] **TONY PRIZMICH:** I'm Tony Prizmich.

[00:07:21] **HOWARD:** And how do you spell that last name?

[00:07:23] **TONY:** P-R-I-Z-M-I-C-H.

[00:07:25] **HOWARD:** Okay.

[00:07:27] **ELMER:** Elmer Mevert. M, as in Mary, E, V as in Victor, E-R-T. Mevert.

[00:07:34] **LEON DE PARTIE:** Leon De Partie. Capital D-E. Capital P-A-R-T-I-E.

[00:07:40] **JOHN ALBERG:** Alberg. A-L-B-E-R-G.

[00:07:46] **HOWARD:** And your first name?

[00:07:48] **JOHN:** John.

[00:07:51] **EDWARD THAYNE:** Edward Thayne. T-H-A-Y-N-E.

[00:08:01] **HOWARD:** Why don't we each go around the room, and tell me how you became involved in the waterfront. The year you came here, and what attracted you to the waterfront. And why don't you tell me your name again, so we get it on the tape. First name.

[00:08:15] **TONY:** Tony Prizmich. I started on the waterfront in 1928, off and on. That was the finger system that we were working then. Out of Seventh Street in the alley in San Pedro, and we went around prospecting on jobs. So you would go in and get a job. Sometimes you got it and sometimes you went down to the driver and you didn't get nothing.

[00:08:41] **HOWARD:** Now what exactly was the finger system?

[00:08:44] **TONY:** You work, you don't work. This guy works, he works. That's the system we used to use over in the white boats.

[00:08:52] **HOWARD:** Wasn't the fink hall [non-union dispatch halls] around in those days?

[00:08:53] **TONY:** Yes, it was, we used it then too. Right in the alley.

[00:08:58] **HOWARD:** So the fink hall wasn't really centralized in dispatching them, huh?

[00:09:01] **TONY:** That was in the dispatch hall, right outside.

[00:09:04] **HOWARD:** And they just literally fingered people out, like a shape-up?

[00:09:07] **TONY:** That's exactly right.

[00:09:11] **HOWARD:** What was the employer's purpose in setting up the fink hall?

[00:09:16] **TONY:** Well, they had the seamen's upstairs, and the dispatch hall was downstairs for the stevedores. Now they got the extra men coming in the hall from downstairs. For us guys, we can never get in a gang, so we work extra. All we could work was two hours, three hours. Work bananas, hustle baggage. We made more money hustling baggage than we did stevedoring.

[00:09:41] **HOWARD:** [laughs] What was the work like in those days?

[00:09:47] **TONY:** I don't want to put it on the record.

[00:09:48] **HOWARD:** Go ahead, I've got a lot worse than that on here.

[00:09:51] **TONY:** But it was assholes and elbows. You didn't open up your mouth, you worked. You worked them white boats, and he told you to go on that port, you hustled!

[00:10:01] **HOWARD:** What were the white boats?

[00:10:02] **TONY:** Yale and Harvard. The Los Angeles Steamship [Company] . And if I couldn't get no job there, I'd go down to the Humboldt, [inaudible] _____ and the San Juan, the White Flyer [Line] right on First Street, on the front street there. And I can get a job. And that was only 55 cents an hour.

[00:10:30] **HOWARD:** Why do you think the men didn't try—or were there any attempts to agitate for unions? In this period at all?

[00:10:36] **TONY:** No, not at that period.

[00:10:38] **HOWARD:** None at all?

[00:10:43] **TONY:** You mention union, you'd be blacklisted. You'd never get on the waterfront!

[00:10:48] **HOWARD:** No secret efforts going on?

[00:10:49] **TONY:** No, not at that time. Not at that time. Because I remember as a boy when I sold papers in San Pedro, in '21 they had a big strike—I mean in '21 they started and '23 they hit.

[00:11:03] **HOWARD:** What do you remember about the '23 strike? Anything?

[00:11:05] **TONY:** I sold a lot of papers! I got a dime a copy.

[00:11:09] **HOWARD:** What were you selling? The Times?

[00:11:11] **TONY:** I was selling the Wobblies paper.

[00:11:12] **HOWARD:** You were? The Industrial Solidarity?

[00:11:14] **TONY:** You better believe I did.

[00:11:16] **HOWARD:** How old were you?

[00:11:17] **TONY:** I was only a punk kid. But I sold them, a dime a copy.

[00:11:22] **HOWARD:** And you sold a lot?

[00:11:23] **TONY:** You better believe it.

[00:11:24] **HOWARD:** How many do you think you sold? During the '23 strike?

[00:11:26] **TONY:** Fifty or sixty sheets.

[00:11:29] **HOWARD:** And that was weekly, right?

[00:11:30] **TONY:** Yeah, better believe it was.

[00:11:31] **OUTSIDE:** Are you comfortable here, alright?

[00:11:33] **HOWARD:** Yeah, we're fine. Thanks a lot.

[00:11:35] **OUTSIDER:** Alright. Remember to quote me in.

[00:11:41] **HOWARD:** What do you remember about the '23 strike? You were young I realize but—

[00:11:45] **TONY:** I remember a lot of blood. I remember that. I remember that Liberty Hill and the massive blood of the PED folk [strikers from San Pedro] . I mean they worked the hall and dressed like sailors, out of the navy.

[00:12:02] **HOWARD:** Who did?

[00:12:04] **TONY:** The cops!

[00:12:04] **HOWARD:** The cops dressed up as sailors?

[00:12:06] **TONY:** Better believe they was.

[00:12:07] **HOWARD:** And then attacked strikers?

[00:12:09] **TONY:** Yeah. I was trying to remember, what was that Mexican's name? [?Guthrie?] ! Was it [?Guthrie?] ?

[00:12:14] **HOWARD:** Yeah, [?Guthrie?] .

[00:12:16] **TONY:** Yeah, my god, did they work him over. Yeah, you better believe it. That was at in Liberty Hill!

[00:12:24] **ELMER:** The Big Three: [?Freebies?] , [?Frikes?] , Baldwin.

[00:12:29] **TONY:** That's it, Baldwin.

[00:12:33] **ELMER:** The Big Three: [?Crikies?] , Baldwin, and Cole.

[00:12:34] **TONY:** Cole was in that too. They were all in on it.

[00:12:40] **HOWARD:** All in on what?

[00:12:41] **ELMER:** Cops. Working these guys over.

[00:12:42] **HOWARD:** Is that right?

[00:12:43] **ELMER:** Oh yeah. Baldwin was the Mexican guy.

[00:12:47] **TONY:** Sgt. Baldwin, he had a good name of pinching the women. He'd come out of a bar, and then he'd proposition them, so they wouldn't go down in the [inaudible] _____.

[00:13:03] **ELMER:** Par to the course.

[00:13:03] **TONY:** You better believe it. He was very good at that.

[00:13:07] **HOWARD:** How big was the Wobblies impact in that strike? Do you have any way of knowing?

[00:13:15] **ELMER:** You're going back a lot of years, buddy. I don't know whether it was 400 or 500 in those days or not. About 400 or 500.

[00:13:29] **HOWARD:** The paper counts said there were 1200 or so—strikers. And they estimated about 400 to 500 were Wobblies.

[00:13:36] **ELMER:** Oh yeah.

[00:13:37] **HOWARD:** Does that seem reasonable?

[00:13:38] **ELMER:** Yeah that sounds right. I remember when they raided the one [IWW Hall] on Left—walked them on Mesa Street.

[00:13:49] **TONY:** No, Twelfth and Centre! [Rodin?] got burned. I remember that. That was upstairs.

[00:14:00] **HOWARD:** Who's Rodin?

[00:14:01] **TONY:** They dumped the coffee on the kid, burned him with coffee, yup. Better believe it.

[00:14:10] **HOWARD:** Does that square with your recollections of that period? Do you have anything to add?

[00:14:13] **ELMER:** Well, I have a couple of things to add. You asked about the fink hall, well after the '23 Wobblies strike—

[00:14:19] **HOWARD:** This is Elmer, right?

[00:14:22] **ELMER:** Yes. The unions that existed were completely demoralized. So the employer, to give a nice face to this, they set up the blue book system—it was really nothing but a registration. If you talked union—to all intents and purposes, it was ostensibly a union, but it was not a union. To be called a union—it was a copy union.

[00:14:48] **HOWARD:** You called it a blue book down here?

[00:14:50] **ELMER:** The blue book, yeah that's right.

[00:14:52] **HOWARD:** I never heard of that expression except for in San Francisco.

[00:14:54] **ELMER:** It was a registration out of the employer's domination. It was no more a union than the Nazis. Like he says, if you couldn't make a blue book, you had to hustle it on your own. That's how I got started.

[00:15:13] **HOWARD:** How did you make a blue book? How were you brought into that?

[00:15:17] **ELMER:** Well if figured you were a nice little worker after the '23 debacle, and you come down there with your hat in your hand and say, "I'll be a good boy, I won't talk anymore unionism—." Okay, you got a blue book. Now my father was longshoreman at that time; he got blackballed.

[00:15:32] **HOWARD:** As result of the '23 strike?

[00:15:35] **ELMER:** Yeah, my dad was very active within the coal mine, organized the coal miners in New Mexico, over there.

[00:15:41] **HOWARD:** Was it coal? Or was it hard rock? Do you know?

[00:15:46] **ELMER:** He worked in gold and coal. Gold mines and coal.

[00:15:49] **HOWARD:** Was he in the Western Federation of Miners?

[00:15:51] **ELMER:** Yes.

[00:15:51] **HOWARD:** He was? Interesting.

[00:15:53] **ELMER:** And he got ran out of the state, along with Archie Royal's old man—he's still around—Archie Royal's old man, he got run out of the state at the end of the picketing an outfit, and finally got into the California waterfront. And right off the bat, he got mixed up in the Wobblies Strike. As a result, my dad got blackballed.

[00:16:15] **HOWARD:** Was your dad a Wobbly?

[00:16:18] **ELMER:** I really don't know.

[00:16:19] **HOWARD:** He was sympathetic though, I take it?

[00:16:21] **ELMER:** Yes, yes. But I really don't know. I have a hunch on this, because when he bummed a ride from Albuquerque, New Mexico, the brake [brakeman] he says, "Where you riding off?" And he says, "I'm riding on the red card," And he says, "Get off from under them rods and get in the caboose. And you could go to California in style." So he must have been a Wobbly. But I never saw the card. I mean, the fact that he rode to California in a caboose, with a sympathetic brakeman proved he got something on the hall.

But then, once again, my dad was blackballed, until we started organizing here. I was just a kid out of high school, 1932. I got my first job on the waterfront, at the white boats.

[00:17:13] **HOWARD:** ILA hall?

[00:17:15] **ELMER:** You better believe it. You didn't know if you were going to get paid for 15 minutes, or if you get a banana boat, you can work for 10, 12, 14 hours. Or sometimes, my dad finally got over a gang, later on, and you started a shift, you finished. It was men dropped in the tracks, been working 20 hours, 30 hour shifts. If you started a shift, then you finished. There was none of this, eight hours shift. You started shift you finished.

[00:17:46] **HOWARD:** I remember some of the testimonies, from the '33 hearing and people said that they worked 72 hours straight.

[00:17:53] **ELMER:** That's true. You started a shift, you finished it.

[00:17:56] **LEON:** Your feet would bleed, in-between your toes. You better believe it.

[00:18:01] **ELMER:** Now as Pete pointed out, if you were lucky enough you'd get a blue book. Along with that came some prerequisites for the bosses. A jug of wine here and there. Paint the house.

[00:18:17] **TONY:** Cut the lawn.

[00:18:18] **ELMER:** Maybe shacking up with your old lady, or whatever. Yeah that's right. That's how it all went out.

[00:18:22] **TONY:** That's true.

[00:18:24] **HOWARD:** It sounds like the shape-up was as bad here as anywhere else.

[00:18:27] **ELMER:** You'd go out and cut the avocado trees on the weekend or build a fence. That's true.

[00:18:35] **HOWARD:** Before we get to '33, let's go around here and get everybody's impressions. Why don't you tell us, Leon, about when you came on the waterfront, and if this squares with your recollections?

[00:18:43] **LEON:** My name is Leon De Partie, and I came on the waterfront in 1930, and I worked on the white boats, as these people have told you, these other two guys here. And working the white boats was really something. You'd work about three hours, four hours—it was just a short run. But it was all for young fellows, more or less. If you couldn't run with those two-wheelers—they had two wheel trucks—if you couldn't run with them you wouldn't be around for very long.

[00:19:11] **HOWARD:** Hand trucks? Literally ran?

[00:19:13] **LEON:** You had to! You had to do it. You had to keep up with the pace.

[00:19:15] **HOWARD:** That's incredible.

[00:19:17] **LEON:** That's one thing. Now let's talk about Bridges. Harry Bridges, as far as I'm concerned, was a person you could depend on. His word was truth. No lies. He would confront anything that came up that he thought was wrong before the membership, and not bat an eye. And he'd tell you. People honored him for that. They respected him for that. As a negotiator, there was no one better on the Pacific Coast or anywhere else that I know of, in my younger days. That's all about I can say about Harry, because Harry was a good negotiator. And that's what we had, it was a negotiator. And the reason he stayed there? Those are the reasons. He was honest etc.

And now let's talk about the gangs, like for instance, these—probably hadn't mentioned yet—but they had steady gangs in this harbor—prior to the 1934 strike. Incidentally, I was in the '34 strike, all of us here are members of the '34 strike.

[00:20:16] **HOWARD:** I agree.

[00:20:17] **LEON:** So, I remember they had steady gangs, as I said. And what Tony had told you a few moments ago, about in the alley—getting extra jobs, because in the event that some guy broke a leg, got sick, unable to work or something like that, they would call that hall, the Fink Hall, which was Seven Street, which was called the Marine Service Bureau at the time. And they called that and anyone there they thought was

qualified, they'd point him out and send him out on the job. He'd get two or three hours. The next day, the other fellow would come back because he belonged to the steady gang. And the steady gang was one of the things we broke up after the '34 strike. I remember when Pedro Pete—he was known as Pedro Pete, Pete Peterson was his name.

[00:21:04] **JOHN:** The secretary.

[00:21:05] **HOWARD:** Was that Scabby Peterson? Was that the same guy?

[00:21:08] **LEON:** No. Pete Peterson was the Secretary of the ILA. He went to San Francisco and he got a negotiated agreement with the rest of them—with Bridges and etcetera—and when he brought it down here, we rejected it. That was the start. Now this is what split up the ILA down here and the ILWU from the ILA. I'm trying to remember this. It was a long time ago. But I remember him coming down with an agreement, and everybody voted it out. Sent him back up there for the agreement again, he came back down again with an unthinkable agreement again.

[00:21:52] **HOWARD:** And he was the ILA representative, right?

[00:21:54] **LEON:** He was a representative. He had followers, which we called the Dirty Dozen. I could name them but it's the Dirty Dozen—that's all I can say.

[00:22:05] **ELMER:** I can probably name all of them.

[00:22:06] **HOWARD:** Could you? I'd like to get the names, unless you're afraid of confidentiality or something. I can turn it off if you want to.

[00:22:11] **LEON:** No, no, no, it isn't that. We might not have the right names, you know? I don't want to involve anybody that—

[00:22:17] **HOWARD:** None of them are around still, are they?

[00:22:19] **LEON:** Not that I know of. Red Dutton was one of them, he was out at [inaudible] _____ Harbor. He had a gang out there, at the time, before the '34 strike and one of the preferred men—what we called steady men. Preferred, by the company. And he would run the gang and let's remember one thing, any man that's hatched in, and running again—he was the boss of that gang. And if he didn't conform with the boss, the boss would tell him to take the gang and go back to the hall. In other words, it was curtains for him and whoever it was in his entire group. It went that far.

[00:22:53] **HOWARD:** Now when you had steady gangs, you worked pretty much as a group then? It was dispatched as a gang, and if they had vacancies, they sent out some extra men to fill them.

[00:23:01] **LEON:** Well, there was certain people here who had gangs, but they weren't workmen. But they don't like to jump up the workmen too much. But there were problems around too, believe me. A couple of

them had gangs, and if you didn't live in the house that they owned, you didn't work in a gang! That went that way.

The employer was very bad with us guys anyhow. He'd just take us out and just work us till we dropped, like they say. I remember working at Diamond Head—16 men in a car. And now that's four men to bucket. Four buckets in the car—just plain buckets for shoveling. We were shoveling nitrate, and the nitrate had been hit by water, and we were trying to pick that—you can take a pick and hit that stuff and you wouldn't put a nickel's dent in it. And 16 of us working under that hook, and they just pushed the car, you and the next one in line to fill up your bucket. And we worked there, I think it was 36 hours on that ship. And then from there we went over to Claude Benson's ship—I'm trying to think of the name of it—the Orange Boats—the English Boats. Yeah, the Orange Boats on Turtle Island!

[00:24:20] **HOWARD:** Orange Boats?

[00:24:22] **EDWARD:** They came in there in the old hall line. The old hall line, they'd come in on Saturdays and sail—

[00:24:24] **LEON:** I'm trying to think of the name of the ships—anyhow, we worked there around the clock. And we had to work there, because believe me, because anytime you worked with Benson's gang, you worked! That gang was a hustling gang. All young guys, and they were all strapping and all were able to work, believe me. They didn't—they just went at it and you followed them. And you held up your end, or you get the hell out.

[00:24:51] **ELMER:** If I could just interject for just one moment, you forgot something important. During the '23 strikes, the Ku Klux Klan was very strong in San Pedro.

[00:25:01] **LEON:** I forgot about that.

[00:25:02] **ELMER:** They had big, lush headquarters in San Pedro—still stands there, a brick building on Tenth Street. Great, big hall and the Klan was tough. And they would unite these crooked politicians and these cops—like Baldwin, Crikey and Emrick and Cole. Your name was mud if you were in a union. And they didn't tell anyone.

They burned this young boy, one of the Rodin boys—

[00:25:37] **HOWARD:** That was the coffee incident you told me about.

[00:25:38] **ELMER:** They would burn crosses and they would threaten. You didn't know who belonged.

[00:25:44] **HOWARD:** Why was the Klan so strong here exactly? In Southern California? Especially in Pedro.

[00:25:47] **ELMER:** Well there was big, phony super-patriotic movement after World War II. The communists were taking over, the Bolsheviks were taking over. So these people panicked and the Klan took over, they practically ran this town for two or three years.

[00:26:03] **TONY:** That's right. That's true.

[00:26:05] **HOWARD:** They were that strong, huh?

[00:26:06] **LEON:** Well, I forgot to say, there was a Wobblies office on Sixteenth, above the Globe Theater, remember?

[00:26:15] **TONY:** Yeah, yeah, that's right.

[00:26:17] **LEON:** On the right-side of the street. About four, five doors up there. It was there in 1934.

[00:26:25] **HOWARD:** It was there?

[00:26:25] **LEON:** 'Thirty-three. That's right. It was right there. Above the barber shop. Above the Globe Theater.

[00:26:35] **HOWARD:** And that was as late as '33?

[00:26:37] **TONY:** Yeah, '33, '34.

[00:26:38] **HOWARD:** Okay. Before we get onto that, let me go around and make sure I get everyone's impressions on this, John, why don't you tell me, when did you get started on the Waterfront and what are your impressions?

[00:26:48] **JOHN:** Well, I tried to work in '33 when Pedro Pete started unionizing unions. Signing up, you know? For union. But it wasn't union yet. So, I couldn't get a job, except weekends once or twice there, and a couple of hours. Like on a Saturday, I was out working the ships. So anyway, I went to see the man, the big boss. And after that I asked about getting a book, "Oh, no we can't do that. You might try to work extra [inaudible] ____." And what the hell, I couldn't get away with that so I went back on the ship, but I joined the union at that time and I kept a good job. And when—after the '34 strike, so I came on the waterfront, and that was unionized already and union members running with us, dispatched and it was many things like you just heard it in here. That was before the union time.

[00:27:58] **HOWARD:** So, you came on in '33? Just before the strike.

JOHN. [To Edward] Yeah. Now it's your turn.

Okay, Edward, tell me about it.

[00:28:04] **EDWARD:** Well, I came in on 1924. I had two brothers, working on the waterfront. That's how I got started. I was working in L.A. on a milk truck. I delivered milk from door to door, and when they thought I was old enough. Why don't I come down and go to work?

[00:28:24] **HOWARD:** How old were you when you came down? Do you remember?

[00:28:26] **EDWARD:** Twenty years old.

[00:28:26] **HOWARD:** Twenty.

[00:28:29] **EDWARD:** And they took me down to the white boats and introduced me to Bob Booth, the foreman and told him, "This is my brother, and he'd like a job." "Okay. Take a two-wheeler and go to work."

Going down the ships they had a conveyor running in there that pulled you out, you had to hook onto the axle of the two-wheeler. It was made to catch into this revolving chain. It helped you out, because the ship—with the tide in and out—the ship got steep at times and you'd hang onto your hold and go up. And when you got out, you better not stop, because there's another man right back of you. And that chain went up pretty fast. You hit it and went. On every on [inaudible] _____ of your two-wheeler. And he had so many of his big steady men working in the hall, and they'd say, "Here! Here! Here!" Just like how you come into this room here, the conveyor's there, and you'd come down and they got men all over, have the loads all ready for you, and put it on your two-wheeler, and give it a shove on you, and you better pull back or you got out. So you headed right up that conveyor. And then you got out on the dock, they'd have men stationed, about every 15 or 20 feet, and you'd go like that. And the last one would've take your stuff, and they had a man there and you'd help him pile your load—whatever it was. And if he was a good boy, and adhered to all their rules and you moved fast enough, and didn't have to go to the crapper too often, well, you could work the next boat when it came in.

[00:30:16] **HOWARD:** Did you have a blue book?

[00:30:18] **EDWARD:** No, nothing. At that time

[END PART ONE/BEGIN PART TWO]

[00:30:30] **LEON:** You carry 500 pounds of sugar. That's five bags of sugar, one hundred pounds apiece. That's how they do it. You've got to balance those things and you were pretty agile, you better believe it.

[00:30:39] **EDWARD:** You had to—according to the tip of the ship, you had to adjust your arms and your height.

[00:30:44] **LEON:** You would have to put a backboard on the end of the blade, on the front of the two-wheeler, and you would carry 11 cases of beer out of there. On one two-wheeler.

[00:30:54] **EDWARD:** And a fifty-gallon around the boiler.

[00:30:57] **LEON:** And a lot of ink that came in.

[00:31:00] **TONY:** And a lot of chain.

[00:31:02] **ELMER:** My first experience at the white boat, I was only two years out of high school, a hustling job with Leonard—anyhow, I forget the name. I only weighed about 155 pounds. Get down that hold, the tide was out, that endless chain was almost vertical. This Jack Foster was a masochist. Or he was sadist, or whatever

you want to call it. So we were all in this corner of the hole, we used to ship a lot of ink down from Seattle—great big, heavy drums, they weighed about 1200 pounds. Do you remember those heavy steel drums? [others laughing] He put the—he had the guys bring over with the drums right on my two-wheeler. And I, oh I was scared. Going out there the with 1200 pounds, all the guys below me; they could've been mashed.

Across the shed, the trucking outfits come in with what they called Nehi soda pop [now RC Cola] . They were setting it off in tiers. Well I made it to the top of the chain with this 1200 pound barrel of ink. I didn't have enough weight to bring the handles down. I shot across that shed, like a bat out of hell. I crashed right into the Nehi soda. There was a wash of soda pop there. Jack Foster says, "You're fired." I got 15 minutes time. That was my first job.

[00:32:34] **EDWARD:** Well, anyway, right on the White Boat there, that was—if you done good there, and was liked by the boss—and the men that was frequently at the warehouse, you know the assistant bosses, Charlie Dunn and a fellow by the name of Stewart. And they were there, giving you this—you know a point. And if you've done good and they were pleased with you at the end of four or five hours on the White Boat or whatever, they could give you a lot of them—unloaded them and loaded them out again, you see. And they would go down to San Diego from here and then they would come back and they'd go back up north.

[00:33:18] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a question about—you came out in '24, you said your brothers were here already, did they participate in the '23 strike?

[00:33:24] **EDWARD:** No, no they didn't. No they were in L.A. Working in L.A.

[00:33:29] **HOWARD:** Were they working on the waterfront?

[00:33:30] **EDWARD:** No. And then they came down while we had a meeting and then when I—and when they thought I was old enough, I came down.

[00:33:38] **HOWARD:** Do you have any recollections of the '23 strike?

[00:33:41] **EDWARD:** I remember when it was on, I was working in Los Alamos [California] , in a [?crane rigging?] .

[00:33:47] **HOWARD:** Any impressions that you can add to what we've heard already?

[00:33:50] **EDWARD:** Well, all I know is when I got here, the companies had steady men. Steady gangs. Every company had so many steady gangs and the amount that they thought they needed for the amount of work they had. And they had steady hatch tenders and a winch driver. And when they needed extra men to fill, or they had more ships coming and they needed them, they called down to what we called a Fink Hall and called out the men, I used to go there and stand in the alley and hold up a hand and I was bypassed a lot of times. But I did get a lot of jobs.

And looking back, picked every Saturday, and had an old fellow down in the docks that we called Handsome Bill. And I don't know why, but he'd always give me a job, and it was assholes and elbows. Because you worked—whether it was ship or dock. And when you went on one of these jobs, you stayed until they released you. And if they told you to go aboard the ship and work, you'd go aboard the ship and worked. If they told you to stay on the dock, you stayed on the dock. And if they come and took you out of a gang and wanted to—like they would have the fertilizer ships from South America, come out from the Pacific Argentina-Brazil line, loaded with bird dung, guano. All the stinkiest fertilizer you ever saw, and bugs and worms crawling in it. Horse's hooves, horse's arms or hooves of cattle and bulls. And you had to pick them up and build loads from that, or shovel them, whichever part would come loose. And if you refused, you were through. And this word went around the harbor. Like I worked most of my time for an Associated Banning Company at that time. That's where they was doing the stevedoring on the white boats. And I got it quite in with Charlie Dunn, Bob Booth—

[00:36:01] **LEON:** Charlie Bateman.

[00:36:01] **EDWARD:** And Charlie Bateman, Charlie Hagerman—they were all foremen down there. And they would bring me back, mainly on the account of my brothers. But I don't know. They always brought me back and I was just considered a steady man there.

[00:36:17] **HOWARD:** Do you remember any talk about efforts to try to unionize during the twenties?

[00:36:22] **EDWARD:** No.

No. It was just a while after the Wobblies tried, and everybody was mum on unions. So if people talked about unions they got in a little room, like this, locked up and they—so no [?columns?] or eavesdroppers would be able to hear—you didn't talk unions.

[00:36:40] **HOWARD:** Do any of you remember Wobblies being around after the '23 strike?

[00:36:45] **LEON:** Yes.

[00:36:46] **TONY:** They were always pointed out to you.

[00:36:49] **HOWARD:** And what were your feelings about them? Did you ever talk to them?

[00:36:52] **TONY:** Oh yeah. We worked with them!

[00:36:55] **LEON:** We used to needle them.

[00:36:57] **HOWARD:** What do you mean, needling?

[00:36:58] **LEON:** All kinds of things, you know. Because we were young in those days. Any young guys were always needling the other guys in those days. Remember the paper hustler—what was his name? Used to come down in the ships all the time. Passing the paper all around. Boom Rogers!

[00:37:19] **ELMER:** Another member of ours—he's still living, he's quite feeble now. He did two years in the pen [penitentiary] for criminal syndicalism [advocating social change through unlawful means] .

[00:37:27] **HOWARD:** Was he one of the convicted ones? What's his name, if you want to give it to me.

[00:37:32] **ELMER:** Paul Ware.

[00:37:32] **LEON:** He's the one that sponsored me.

[00:37:36] **HOWARD:** He did?

[00:37:36] **LEON:** He's the one who sponsored me to the union.

[00:37:38] **ELMER:** He's still as alert and just as much as a union man as there ever was.

[00:37:42] **LEON:** That's right.

[00:37:42] **HOWARD:** Do you know how I can get in touch with him?

[00:37:45] **ELMER:** Paul Ware?

[00:37:48] **HOWARD:** Is it possible?

[00:37:52] **LEON:** Gordon can find him.

[00:37:52] **ELMER:** Massive criminal syndicalism act. That they can even call it a conspiracy, even sitting in a room—

[00:37:57] **EDWARD:** We all knew who they were, they were always pointed out to you.

[00:38:01] **HOWARD:** And what was your impression of him?

[00:38:02] **EDWARD:** Well, the biggest majority of them were good men. From Elmer's father, I think I worked with him a lot and we had a lot of—we had a lot of problems, that's the first time I heard about the union. I didn't know what a union was. When I came here I knew nothing about the union. And I'm working with Elmer's dad, Mr. Mevert. We worked and we become good friends. And there were several others. And they all wanted to do what was right. And tried to give everybody a day's work when they went out. They didn't like the idea of selectivism. Because if you went to the toilet and stayed too long, why, then the next boss, he wouldn't pick you the next day. And you never took a break. And for every man that they hired, they had a job for him. They didn't hire him, and they didn't [have a job for him] .

[00:39:11] **ELMER:** I'm going to ask to be excused. I've got the—I'm feeling awful rotten, sorry. And I've got to see those plumbers before they leave. We got bombed—the whole plumbing system fell apart like the old [inaudible] _____. We have to get the whole thing re-plumbed.

[00:39:30] **HOWARD:** I may come down here—I guess next month, you'll be meeting me again, right?

[00:39:34] **ELMER:** Yes.

[00:39:34] **CHORUS OF VOICES:** First of every month.

[00:39:36] **HOWARD:** Or sometime later. Nice meeting you.

[00:39:39] **ELMER:** I hope that my remarks, along with these other gentlemen here, who are very good friends of mine, were of some of use.

[00:39:45] **HOWARD:** Okay, certainly you are.

[00:39:46] **ELMER:** And I hate to run out like this.

[00:39:47] **HOWARD:** Okay, well I can talk to you again, I'll be coming back again. Thanks a lot.

The reason why I'm asking all these questions is one of the theories I was working with is that the twenty-three strike had a pretty sizable impact on the men that they had seen the Wobblies go out and fight. They were inspired by this, they were crushed, and a lot of bitterness and hostility built up throughout the twenties. So then when '33, '34 came around like an avalanche. Does that make sense?

[00:40:18] **LEON:** When [President Franklin] Roosevelt gave us the right to strike, that's what started it. That's why we have so much respect for Roosevelt.

[00:40:26] **EDWARD:** But they forced us to strike.

[00:40:28] **HOWARD:** Yeah, in '33 and '34.

[00:40:30] **EDWARD:** We took—we had after the Wobbly strike and I came here—we had a pretty good wage and the man done the best he could. You could work. But if you slacked off or showed any signs of being hostile toward the foreman, or any of the personnel, then you were blackballed.

[00:40:57] **JOHN:** If you say "boo," you were out.

[00:40:59] **EDWARD:** That's right. You'd go up on that ship even though it was fertilizer and it made you sick. You went on that ship and worked until you dropped.

[00:41:10] **HOWARD:** Were the Wobblies here after '23?

[00:41:13] **LEON:** Oh yeah.

[00:41:14] **TONY:** Sure.

[00:41:16] **EDWARD:** They stayed right here! Yeah, there's been Wobblies in this organization ever since—

[00:41:24] **LEON:** Yeah, Paul Ware, he's the guy who sponsored me.

[00:41:26] **HOWARD:** How have you got in contact with him?

[00:41:29] **LEON:** Paul Ware seen me get a hold of a Fink and I was working him over.

[00:41:33] **HOWARD:** When? In '23 of something?

[00:41:34] **LEON:** No, 1933.

[00:41:36] **HOWARD:** 1933. So you came in—yeah, okay.

[00:41:38] **EDWARD:** Well there was darn near as many Wobblies as there were regular men when I came here.

[00:41:45] **HOWARD:** There were?

[00:41:46] **EDWARD:** Yeah, there were a lot of Wobblies here.

[00:41:46] **HOWARD:** So there weren't able to fire them in twenty-three so much, huh?

[00:41:52] **EDWARD:** They were undercover! They need men, and they were experienced men. The men that knew what to do, and how to do!

[00:42:02] **HOWARD:** So, you would say there were as many Wobblies as there were non-Wobblies in '24? Or something close?

[00:42:06] **EDWARD:** I was maybe wrong, but I say there were a lot of Wobblies here after the '24 strike. You see, they stayed and worked steady for the company's—most of them took winch driving jobs and hatch tending job, and dock foremen jobs. And the company kept them.

[00:42:29] **HOWARD:** So, they were more experienced and the more skilled men.

[00:42:32] **EDWARD:** Sure, they had years and years of experience in labor. But there were quite a few Wobblies around here. I don't—like I said, I can't tell you how many because I don't know. But at the time of the '34 strike, when we formed our union, I think it was around—if I'm not mistaken, if memory serves me—it was approximately 1200 to 1300 men we had here registered at the time of the '34 strike. A lot of Wobblies.

[00:43:08] **LEON:** I think it was 1165 men registered in the Marine Service Bureau, at that time.

[00:43:12] **HOWARD:** In '33?

[00:43:13] **LEON:** Yeah, that's with the blue books. That's what we talked about.

[00:43:16] **HOWARD:** Okay, that's 1165. Approximately.

[00:43:18] **LEON:** Yeah, approximately. I'm not too far off on that figure.

[00:43:20] **EDWARD:** And most of those went on strike.

[00:43:23] **LEON:** What I started to say is, I had a gang myself—I might have been called a preferred man before the strike—I had a port gang with at the Lasco line which is a Los Angeles Steamship Company. The word Lasco was used as an abbreviation for the name of the company which is Los Angeles Steamship Company. And we worked the Iroquois, the City of Honolulu, the Calawaii. . .

[00:43:50] **EDWARD:** The Diamond Head.

[00:43:51] **LEON:** The Diamond Head and the Corrales. The Corrales brought in sugar—

[00:43:57] **EDWARD:** [inaudible] _____.

[00:43:57] **LEON:** No, no it wasn't in there. That was later.

[00:43:58] **HOWARD:** Are these mostly Matson line ships [Matson, Inc.] ?

[00:43:59] **LEON:** That was later.

[00:44:00] **EDWARD:** Matson took over.

[00:44:03] **LEON:** Let's remember what happened here with Matson. Matson didn't come into this port until 1932, they weren't given the franchise between here and the islands until they bought out the Los Angeles Steamship Company. They took the M off their stacks, because they weren't allowed in there in New Zealand. They had to the M and that's in emblem off the stack, and it was this big white ships going without the M on them.

[00:44:26] **HOWARD:** And that's why you called them white ships then, okay.

[00:44:28] **LEON:** Well, no the white ships—the white boats not ships—the white ships were closer. They ran between here—they ran between Seattle and San Diego. And every other ship after it hit San Francisco, one would go to Portland and come back, the next one would bypass Portland because there wasn't enough cargo to pick up and go to Seattle—

[00:44:53] **OUTSIDE:** Howard, give us a ring, we'll talk to you later.

[00:44:54] **HOWARD:** Okay, thanks very much. You bet.

[00:44:55] **OUTSIDE:** Have a good session.

[00:44:57] **LEON:** The second one would go to Seattle, then it would bypass Portland and come but always in San Francisco and Los Angeles and San Diego. And there was approximately three and four hours of work on

those ships is what it was because they were in and out. They were more than ideal for the businessman because they were good traveling ships at night, they can get on that ship in the afternoon and go to San Francisco and sleep all night, get off and do your business and come back the same way. It was a long night run. It was coastwise. And then they brought in all this cargo inside. And they had to have us young punks around. Because their cargo had to be moved fast.

[00:45:35] **EDWARD:** Yeah, it was the miscellaneous cargo, like we used to call LCL, Less Cargo [?Loss?] . And they'd stack it on the dock and the trucks would haul it out, or we'd go on boxcars or something.

[00:45:46] **LEON:** Anyhow—before I finish my story, I'm getting off the beaten path here—I was one of the steady men in the harbor, had a steady gang. It was a port gang. Now, I didn't drive winches at the time, I was a young guy, but I worked with that gang even though I was—even though I was the gang boss. I did as much work at the rest of them because I had set the pattern for the rest of them. If I didn't do it, they'd find somebody else damn quick. So anyhow, the strike came on. And there were a couple of guys that stayed on in the—not knowing exactly what to do, like Eddie says, he didn't know what a union was. And all of us I believe here sitting here didn't know what—well maybe John did but we don't, at least I don't. And I didn't, I don't remember what a union was either.

[00:46:30] **EDWARD:** We just wanted a job.

[00:46:31] **LEON:** We just—we just wanted a job! It was during the Depression. So anyhow, being one of the guys that had a steady gang, I hit the dock or I hit the streets rather, on picket leave. All right, my whole gang came with me. All right now, when the strike was over, we were all told to go back to our respective places and all of us that didn't want—there were a few of us that stayed, but the majority of the men, the majority of the gang leaders all decided we'd go back to the hall, including me. I remember walking up to Larry Powers, and telling him I says, "Larry, no offense, I got nothing against you," but I said, "I wasn't getting a lot from here to start with," but I says, "Everybody else is working for 24 and 30 hours a week and over in a stretch without stopping. And we're going the hall to better ourselves." And I says, "And I'm taking my gang with me." And I says, "This is it." He says, "That's the thing to do."

There was one boss, he said—he made the mistake in his early days in the '23 strike, and he came down from San Francisco and he struck. And he said that was the worst thing he'd ever done in his life. And he said he didn't want to see young men like myself at that time do it, today. He pushed us out—he didn't exactly push us out, he didn't reprimand us for doing it—let's put it that way.

[00:47:47] **TONY:** There was another one, George Harvey.

[00:47:52] **LEON:** Yeah, George Harvey was another one. He'd come down—

[00:47:54] **JOHN:** Ray Jackson.

[00:47:55] **LEON:** That's right.

[00:47:56] **EDWARD:** Nearly all of those fellows that were mentioned here, and Larry Powers, they came from San Francisco, they put advertisements in the paper for stevedores and good pay. You know, during the twenty-three strike. So those guys came in. Then, after the strike was broken, then, why they kept all those men that came in as strikebreakers and Larry Powers was one of them! And Ray Jackson was one.

[00:48:29] **LEON:** He just pushed us the other way and said, Don't do what I did. He didn't tell us to go strike either. No, nothing at all like that. But when we came back and told him we weren't going to work for him anymore, that we were going to work on the hall on a rotation basis so that everyone can get an equal break—this is what I wanted to do, you follow me?

So anyhow, as far as—I'm trying to, you guys took me down a beaten path.

[00:48:57] **HOWARD:** The question I originally asked was the relative number of Wobblies around and—

[00:49:01] **LEON:** Well, we're kind of young for that.

[00:49:03] **HOWARD:** Yeah, I guess you are.

[00:49:05] **LEON:** Eddie isn't, and John—

[00:49:08] **EDWARD:** In my heart, Elmer's dad—if he was still living which he isn't, and there were several—could tell you that, because they knew. I didn't know. I was just a stevedore. I worked where I was told, I done what I was told, and done the best I could.

[00:49:29] **TONY:** I remember when they had the meetings in Pedro when I used to sell papers.

[00:49:32] **EDWARD:** That's right. And they would tell us, if you want to come to our meetings you can. Well, I was afraid—

[00:49:37] **HOWARD:** Why were they selling the papers, just to make money or did you [inaudible] _____ the Wobblies or . . . ?

[00:49:41] **TONY:** I couldn't sell Examiners or Records in those days, you couldn't get much. I was making eight cents on each copy. And the other papers were only making two cents.

[00:49:49] **HOWARD:** Strictly capitalist proposition then.

[00:49:50] **TONY:** You better believe it.

[00:49:50] **EDWARD:** I remember in the Daily News, you couldn't sell it for two cents!

[00:49:53] **TONY:** Yeah, that's right! So I went the other route.

[00:49:56] **LEON:** You know, I'm 67 years old, 68, and he's got 15 years on me. So that's really—he knows more about it. Yeah and this guy too.

[00:50:05] **EDWARD:** Well, he's 85, 86 right away.

[00:50:08] **TONY:** And I'm 70.

[00:50:10] **JOHN:** Paul Ware is only one year older than I am.

[00:50:14] **EDWARD:** But he was here during that time, and if I'm not mistaken, he was a Wobbly.

[00:50:19] **TONY:** Oh yeah, I know he was.

[00:50:21] **EDWARD:** If you ask Elmer about his father, he couldn't tell you for sure—

[00:50:26] **JOHN:** He had quite a few times in the jail.

[00:50:32] **EDWARD:** He was, Elmer's father.

[00:50:33] **HOWARD:** If it was criminal syndicalism, then he was definitely a Wobbly.

[00:50:36] **JOHN:** Yeah, they all decided to keep their mouth shut.

[00:50:42] **LEON:** Anyhow, during the '34 strike, we had 93 days on the picket line is what we had. And James [?Mayos?] was one of the men that was a picket captain at the bullpen over then in Neptune Avenue. And his boy died during that strike and I took over the picket line. And I had my name on a lot of these guys picket cards in 1934 until the end of the strike and that's—we had a blow out there one night. You know, we crashed the place. And we made quite a scene but I'd rather not talk to you about that part of, you know.

[00:51:28] **EDWARD:** Tommy Parker's brother got killed.

[00:51:31] **LEON:** Yes, Tommy Parker got shot through the stomach—

[00:51:34] **EDWARD:** Tommy's boy—brother—

[00:51:35] **LEON:** Tommy Parker's brother was the one that got killed. [inaudible] _____ Smith, was another one that got shot in the belly.

[00:51:41] **HOWARD:** Now, what were the circumstances surrounding their—

[00:51:44] **LEON:** Well here's what happened, they had hired so-called Pinkerton men to look after their interests that is the employers I'm talking about, and they were Pinkerton men. And what they were ex-gunmen or ex-policemen or whatever you want to call roughnecks from Chicago in that area, and they employed them here. And they were working on us, believe me.

[00:52:03] **EDWARD:** And they tied up a ship down here and let the men live right there and had the bullpen on the outside because they had so many men they couldn't keep them all.

[00:52:16] **LEON:** For years after the strike, we wouldn't allow a Pinkerton on the docks. And we wouldn't allow them on the hall if he had a gun.

[00:52:25] **HOWARD:** They were shot by the Pinkertons then? Dickey Parker?

[00:52:28] **LEON:** They were blamed for it but the Pinkertons were on the Pacific Coast and were the same kind of men that were imported. But they were still Pinkertons. But even so, we wouldn't allow a Pinkerton Man with a gun on us in the harbor, if he had a gun on him, we quit work.

[00:52:46] **TONY:** Just stop, right there.

[00:52:46] **LEON:** Oh yeah, just stop.

[00:52:46] **HOWARD:** Do you remember the exact circumstances under which Parker was shot? Was there someone trying to crash the picket line—

[00:52:54] **LEON:** Oh yeah, we crashed it, I was there that night, I was there. So I know. And I see Smith was on the side of me and he was the one that was shot on the belly. So the bullets were pretty close. So anyhow, but they were shooting at us is what happened.

[00:53:05] **HOWARD:** And what were you doing?

[00:53:06] **LEON:** And they were throwing tear gas at us. And the wind was going the other way. The wind was going the other way. And we picked up these canisters and threw them back. It gave us an opening to come in. And we just tore up the place.

[00:53:18] **HOWARD:** This was that scab boat that they had?

[00:53:21] **LEON:** The name of the boat was the Diamond Head. The big ship was the Diamond Head, and they had a square rig ship, they had a sailing boat—

[00:53:29] **EDWARD:** And they had an Alexander boat all tied up. It was either the Ruth or the Emma.

[00:53:32] **LEON:** That was later.

[00:53:33] **HOWARD:** Now, who was on the boat? Were they just scabs? Or were they Pinkertons?

[00:53:37] **LEON:** Pinkertons taking care of the scabs!

[00:53:39] **HOWARD:** Taking care of the scabs.

[00:53:41] **EDWARD:** They housed their workers because the workers didn't dare leave; they'd get hurt.

[00:53:44] **HOWARD:** See, that's interesting because I was told in L.A. it wasn't really a picketing operating during the '34 strike because the harbor was so expansive—I mean, in San Francisco they set up picket lines and they had a ship dock and they put the scabs on the ship. You're saying you did the same thing here?

[00:53:59] **LEON:** Well, they're running by water, most of the time from ship to ship. They used water taxis. They each had water taxis to use for that purpose.

[00:54:06] **EDWARD:** And the companies would transport them back and forth.

[00:54:08] **HOWARD:** And we're talking about a sizable workforce because as I recall in L.A. they had the same number of scabs as they had regular workers.

[00:54:14] **TONY:** Yeah, you see down in San Francisco during the strike, they call the National Guard out in San Francisco. But there was reason for that.

[00:54:26] **EDWARD:** L.A. Police Department tried to take care of us.

[00:54:28] **LEON:** The reason that that was this part of the country is ruled and governed by the City of Los Angeles and the State of California. And the San Francisco Waterfront is under federal. And that's why they brought in the scabs.

[00:54:45] **HOWARD:** You mean, brought in the National Guard?

[00:54:49] **LEON:** Brought in the militia, to shoot these guys down. This is what happened up there.

[00:54:55] **EDWARD:** But here we had in Los Angeles—

[00:54:55] **LEON:** You see one of them is state and the other is not. And the one down here belongs to the city, in other words, the land belongs to the city and the waterfront belongs to the city. In San Francisco it wasn't so.

[00:55:07] **HOWARD:** Tell me this, how was it possible for so many workers—so many scabs to be recruited so easily in Los Angeles?

[00:55:13] **LEON:** It was easy, they brought them in from around—

[00:55:15] **EDWARD:** Radio, the newspapers. They advertised.

[00:55:19] **HOWARD:** Well, they were doing the same thing in Portland, Seattle, and San Francisco and they didn't succeed though.

[00:55:26] **EDWARD:** You see, they paid them so much money that you would quit a job inland, through say Utah, Arizona, Colorado and you'd read the newspapers and hear the ads, hear them advertising for men on the waterfront. There was no point in that, you'd come and go to work.

[00:55:46] **LEON:** Well, let's face the facts alike. Those people out there didn't know what unions were there either. And they were youngsters, maybe such as yourself. Young men pick up a newspaper looking for a job. And here it is, there's a job for you, no questions asked, come on out and we got a job for you. And they signed you up out there. And you'd come in not knowing what you were walking into. This actually took place.

[00:56:08] **EDWARD:** They had organizers out there too you know. One of the [?problems?] in L.A., you got a lot of employment opportunities in L.A.

[00:56:17] **HOWARD:** I wondering how much of the fact that L.A. was not a union town at all in those days. And San Francisco was more so in the Northwest, and certainly strong. And the Wobblies were very big up there.

[00:56:27] **LEON:** Wobblies were racking up in the lumberyards and the mills, and the sawmills and what have you.

[00:56:31] **HOWARD:** You see that's what's intriguing me, because the Wobblies were very strong here in '23, this was the center of that strike. It was a national strike, it was strongest in Pedro in the whole country and yet, by 10 years later, there's no kind of evidence of unionism at all.

[00:56:44] **LEON:** In the woods is where the Wobblies originated.

[00:56:49] **EDWARD:** You know, you got them. And every now and again they show and these fellows show them too, at times.

[00:56:58] **HOWARD:** Did any Wobblies come in the fore in the '33 and the '34 strike? Were any Wobblies visible in the '33, '34 strike here?

[00:57:05] **LEON:** Yes, but you couldn't prove it.

[00:57:06] **EDWARD:** They didn't ever want to admit it, but they knew you personally. And knew you could be trusted, then they could tell you.

[00:57:13] **TONY:** Then that was the only time that it was accepted.

[00:57:17] **HOWARD:** How about other left-wing groups, there was Marine Workers Industrial Union? Which was close to the communist party organizations. There were very active in San Francisco.

[00:57:27] **LEON:** Let's face the facts of life again, as far as being communist. The word communist was used loosely. And it was too loose. The word was, we'll say [pause]. . .

[00:57:41] **EDWARD:** Tainted?

[00:57:42] **LEON:** No, no. The word I'm after is socialist. There were a lot of socialists around. And a lot of them were called communists. And the only ones that I don't recall seeing too many communists is out and out

communists, but a lot of socialists that believed that states should take care of them, under those terms. And then there was a lot of that going on.

[00:58:06] **HOWARD:** There was?

[00:58:06] **LEON:** Oh yes. It still goes on.

[00:58:08] **HOWARD:** [inaudible] _____. Oh certainly yeah.

[00:58:10] **LEON:** Sure, you can't stop it. And well my belief is probably different than others, but my belief is that there are certain things that you got to socialize. Like the air, almost everybody should be purified with other people. It don't belong to anyone. The waterways don't belong to anybody. We need the water. It belongs to the people. I mean this sort of thing, to me, has to be socialized.

[00:58:31] **HOWARD:** Okay, but the Wobblies and groups like that were talking more than that. They were talking about workers running the country and doing away with capitalists who exploit them and things like that. I'm trying to get a sense on whether they had an impact on the men, did it have an impact on you? When they would say that?

[00:58:46] **TONY:** No.

[00:58:47] **HOWARD:** No, not at all.

You were selling the newspaper—

[00:58:49] **TONY:** I was just selling the paper.

[00:58:50] **HOWARD:** Just to make money.

[00:58:52] **EDWARD:** Well, Tony, you figured out later as you got older that you got jobs—you had a positive impact—

[00:58:59] **TONY:** Yeah, yeah, yeah in that way.

[00:59:01] **EDWARD:** Yeah, it all had an impact on all of us.

[00:59:05] **TONY:** Yeah that's true.

[00:59:05] **HOWARD:** It had an impact in terms of getting your job. But how about your outlook on the world? I don't—see when I ask this question, everybody always says, oh no, there was no impact at all. But then they'll start talking to me and it's clear that they have views that are a little different from the rest of the world.

[00:59:18] **LEON:** Let's base it on this basis, we were educated by them.

[00:59:22] **HOWARD:** Right, that's what I'm getting at.

[00:59:24] **LEON:** In how to do things, how to accomplish something. And to get what you want.

[00:59:28] **EDWARD:** How not to be too subservient.

[00:59:30] **LEON:** And that was no reason to—

[00:59:32] **EDWARD:** And [not] to run every time the boss whistled.

[00:59:35] **LEON:** You got to slow down on that.

[00:59:36] **EDWARD:** And if you didn't like to work fertilizer, which I hated. I was allergic to it and shoveled wheat, with the dust. I just went and told the boss and told him, look, every time I worked it I get sick.

[00:59:51] **LEON:** And you did get sick.

[00:59:53] **EDWARD:** And could you give me a better job?

[01:00:00] **HOWARD:** So the Wobblies did educate you?

[01:00:03] **LEON:** Well those long ships that he's talking about—guano is what it is—a shoveling job, and it would be—oh, I say a foot deep perhaps, from the deck and you'd shovel it off the decks into the buckets. And the first two or three hours, you'd get sick. And after that there's nothing else to be sick about, you just kept on working.

[01:00:26] **EDWARD:** You swallowed enough of it. They didn't furnish you with any protective clothing. They didn't furnish you with any protective shoes—

[01:00:35] **TONY:** You'd bring your own boots.

[01:00:36] **EDWARD:** Anything. It didn't matter if it was in the rain, you had no protection at all. Whatever they told you to do, if it was working in the rain, you worked in the rain.

[01:00:46] **LEON:** And you got to remember too.

[END PART TWO/BEGIN PART THREE]

I got down in the hold. You know what the gangs told me, 'you know you gotta buy the bottle.' I'm broke, I could've died. I only had 10 cents. Five cents to cross the ferry to come to the island. And they said I had to buy a bottle. And I said, "How the hell am I going buy a bottle, I got [inaudible] ____." And they says, "Don't worry about it, you'll get the bottle. We'll get you a check." They took the check and they got the bottle. From that time on I was in with [?Nick Bucceti's?] gang. That's how I got that extra job going down over in the island. Well like Larry Powers, over there. I used to get a job over there. But I made more money [?bumping them red caps?] . Hunting cars.

[01:01:38] **EDWARD:** When I first came here, Larry Powers break the Wobbly strike in '23 and he had appointed a ship gang for Associated Banning Company. And like I said, there was no foreman or bosses. There were superintendents for that job. There was Nick Miller and Tom James and that fellow, the [inaudible] _____. Those three men were superintendents for the Associated Banning Company where I went to work. And they assigned the gangs: one, two, three, four, five, six. So whenever we took on that ship, and they told that gang leader what they expected him to work. He went down and told his men, that worked steady for him, he had six steady men and two steady front men. And they told him, "We want you to take this cargo here in this area and we want big loads and plenty of them." And the hatch tender would holler down and say 'all I want to see is assholes and elbows.' You better believe it. 'And if your men don't want it, you hit the ladder and get someone else.' And that's when they called the hall in San Pedro to get extra men. Anybody who couldn't cut the mustard.

[01:03:12] **LEON:** You had to get smart. Most these foremen didn't recognize you by your face.

[01:03:17] **HOWARD:** [chuckles] Enough said.

[01:03:18] **JOHN:** The best way to learn more of these things and some asshole place and live through it. And then you'll remember it from A through Z.

[01:03:29] **HOWARD:** That's right. That's why I talk to you guys because you did. Let me ask you more questions about the '34 strike before we move on though. How violent was it? Was there a great deal of violence? I mean, we know that two people were killed—

[01:03:43] **TONY:** More than you'll ever know. There was a lot of it.

[01:03:47] **HOWARD:** Why don't you tell me what you remember?

[01:03:50] **TONY:** Well, it got so damn rough on the island, we formed a goon squad.

[01:03:55] **HOWARD:** Now the island is—

[01:03:56] **TONY:** Terminal Island. We formed a good squad to stop the guys from coming down from Los Angeles.

[01:04:02] **EDWARD:** We have one right here in P.E.D. [Pedro]

[01:04:03] **HOWARD:** 'Them guys' being the scabs?

[01:04:05] **TONY:** The scabs. And we'd get them trucks. And hit those windshields and break them up. Do anything just to stop them from going in the gate. Some of them would be [inaudible] _____ and some of them would get through us. But there were shots.

[01:04:22] **LEON:** There was all kinds of stuff that went on.

[01:04:24] **TONY:** There were shots!

[01:04:25] **LEON:** There was a lot of fist-fighting, mostly.

[01:04:27] **TONY:** You better believe it.

[01:04:28] **LEON:** There wasn't too many guns used, let's use that.

[01:04:33] **EDWARD:** The men came off the waterfront and walked up here to Avalon [Boulevard] from the right of here, about two blocks from here now, or where the PED depot was, and head back from L.A., if they—the men was spotted around—found that they had been working down there, they came off the docks down there and came up to get on, they were taken care of. They were worked over.

[01:04:59] **HOWARD:** It seems to me that the strike here was more violent than any other port on the West Coast. Let me explain why, to see if this even makes sense. Because the other ports had established picket lines and several hundred—several thousand men doing it and very small scab forces of maybe a couple hundred at most. Here you had several hundred—almost over 1,000 scabs working and you had pickets lines spread out all across this lengthy port. So they were always going through the lines and there was always fights. Does that seem to make sense?

[01:05:27] **TONY:** Yes, that's right.

[01:05:28] **LEON:** At one particular time we had almost 30 miles of waterfront.

[01:05:30] **HOWARD:** Right, and San Francisco is real small.

[01:05:33] **LEON:** Now it's about 55. 55 miles of waterfront, today. Because of the man-made harbor and what have you in Norm Beach and what have you. I'm calling Norm Beach in San Pedro—I mean in Los Angeles Harbor.

But—I was trying to say something but I—

[01:05:52] **HOWARD:** Talking about violence in—

[01:05:53] **LEON:** Well as far as the violence is concerned, sure there's violence. There's always violence in the picket line like this. Especially when you get rowdy men. And you got rowdy men to confront. You just confront them, that's all. You're on your own and that's it.

[01:06:06] **EDWARD:** Stopped a car with a gang of men in it and you and you looked them over and there was—

[01:06:08] **LEON:** Let me give you an example.

[01:06:08] **EDWARD:** And carrying hooks and guns and things. You knew they're bent over in taking your job and there was a fight. Right there. And usually the car was wrecked or the car was run down and they beat up the men.

[01:06:22] **HOWARD:** That happened extensively, I take it?

[01:06:24] **LEON:** I'll give you an example.

[01:06:25] **EDWARD:** Day after day. Night after night!

[01:06:27] **HOWARD:** I want examples if you can give them to me.

[01:06:31] **LEON:** I will give you an example. I'm the guy. I was the captain of the bullpen line—the picket line over there. Vincent Hutcherson was an ex-fighter and we were buddy-buddies more or less. Anyhow here came a group of guys came out of that bullpen. And we didn't like their looks. And so we got into my car—my car! And started out. And it was C.J. Brown and myself and Hutch. Hutcherson.

[01:07:06] **TONY:** Yeah, we called him Big Hutch.

[01:07:07] **LEON:** And anyhow, we pulled out and I says, "Come out, let's go." And here's a guy holding a gun on us on through a rear window of a car and we're going after him. I'm the other driver. And we followed him clear on Long Beach. And this was happening in the bullpen on Neptune Avenue. We trailed him clear to the center of Ocean Street in Long Beach. There used to be a little stand and the cop would stand up right there and direct traffic. That's before they had signal lights. The cop would just direct the traffic going down Pine Avenue and various places down in front.

We pulled up right in front of that and I jumped out of the car and my car was in the middle, and I told Brownie [C.J. Brown], I says, "Move my car out of the way. Get it out of here." And so I jumped out in one side, Hutch jumped in on the other side and then we started off on those guys. I told the cop that was there that was directing traffic, I says, "Arrest those guys, they got a gun!" Well, the policeman didn't exactly know what was going on so he drew his gun and he [inaudible] _____ him out. So we helped him. And we helped him out and we got arrested. My car got locked up because C.J. got out there and watched the fight.

[01:08:18] **HOWARD:** Why were arrested? For interfering in an arrest or something?

[01:08:20] **LEON:** Breaking glass on a public highway, profanity, fighting. Anyhow, we went to court and—we went to court. Anyhow, the judge asked me what the reason was, I says, "Well you do the talking." I was just a young guy, I was in my twenties. And I says, "Your Honor," I says, "All we're trying to do is better our jobs," I says, "And better our livelihood." And I said, "These guys are coming down here and taking our work and wages We're just trying to get it back! We don't want them down here." And that's about all I could say. And I sat down and that's all I could say. The jail was not in Long Beach at the time. The earthquake in 1933 in had knocked that jail down—there was no jailhouse in Long Beach. So they took us to Belmont Shore [California] .

[01:09:14] **HOWARD:** You were convicted I take it, right?

[01:09:16] **LEON:** I was convicted. I was taken, yeah. So anyhow, the judge came down—I guess if you want to leave it out, you can leave it out—but the judge came down in the jail and he wanted to let me out, but wouldn't let Hutch out. And I said, 'no I won't go unless Hutch goes.' And he let us out on our own. If I were to be responsible for Hutch, he would let us go. And we came back to the court when we're supposed to.

Well, I'll tell you, we finally got a notice to appear.

Anyhow, I was allowed the privileges of having Hutch with me. So we start to come back. The cops are looking for me. And everyone is being so good to me. You know, they don't want to tell anybody where I am. And I got nothing to hide. They tell them, well he's not in town—this and that and the other thing. Finally, I said, 'who was looking for me?' The police! So I went down to the police station, down on B Street in Wilmington [California] and I says, "I hear you people are looking for me. What do you want with me?" And he says, "We got a letter for you. Is your name so-and-so?" "Yup." "Let me see your driver's license." I show him my license. "Okay, it's yours." I said, "What's in it?" He says, "We don't know and we don't want to know." The cop gave it to me, it was on the desk at that time, I went there and opened it and I was told to appear in court. But I had to bring Hutch. But Hutch was drunk, I couldn't find him. [chuckles] I went to his wife—his wife was pregnant, what have you—and I said, "I've got to find him." I says, "Heck! He's supposed to be under my wing." And she says, "I don't know where he is!" So I found him anyhow, in one of the speakeasies in town. And anyhow, I brought him back and went to court with him and—oh!

Before that, we were put in the jailhouse and inside, for the thirty minutes, I was the judge of kangaroo court [an unofficial court trying people without good evidence] and he was the sheriff. Of kangaroo court! We took over.

[01:11:26] **EDWARD:** Well, it was a pretty rough day for everyone in town. It was one of our towns, there at that time.

[01:11:31] **LEON:** See, we didn't have any guns. We didn't have the guns. But, see the people on other—went, 'Oh this is talked about here, what's brought out here.' The employer was giving permits to these people to carry guns. And we didn't have them, we couldn't get one anyhow.

[01:11:47] **HOWARD:** Do you remember any incidents like that that involved violence? I'm not—

[01:11:51] **TONY:** Yeah.

[01:11:52] **HOWARD:** Okay, tell me about it.

[01:11:53] **TONY:** Bill, Greg and we had another fellow with us, and we caught two teamsters that just went through the gates on the island. And we followed him, when he came out, we had two guys beside the driver. We followed him all the way to Pedro, in the front of the Warner Brothers theatre [Warner Grand Theater]. He parked right on Sixth Street with the truck. So Bill, Greg, and myself and these other guys, we went after him. We got him and we worked him over right there, in the theatre, right in front of the theatre.

[01:12:33] **LEON:** The Old Globe?

[01:12:34] **TONY:** No, the Warner Brothers! Up close to Pacific Avenue. And we got away from them. They were all bleeding out there. We moved out right, because the law was coming in right after us. So I was standing by the hall, in fact I was probably with Paul Ware and who should come down but [?Hackey?] and Cole. "We want you." And I said, "I didn't do nothing." "Yes, you did, come on." They took me up to Seventh Heaven [city jail on seventh floor of the John S. Gibson Jr. Municipal Building] in Pedro, walked me up to the jailhouse, locked me up. Bill and Greg was still on the loose! And they want to know about the incident at the Warner Brothers Theatre, if it was one of us. And I says, "I wasn't there." He says, "Yeah, they fingered you out." And I says, "Well, have the man prove it." Luckily, nobody showed up but they held me there for 72 hours. They transferred me from Pedro to Lincoln Heights [neighborhood in central Los Angeles] . And I had to walk from Lincoln Heights to San Pedro! [approx. 26 miles]

[01:13:44] **LEON:** I don't doubt that.

[01:13:45] **TONY:** I had to walk!

[01:13:48] **HOWARD:** So would it be fair to say that most of the men who participated in the '34 strike either directly came into contact with violence or indirectly in some way?

[01:13:57] **TONY:** I wouldn't say all of them. Just a group.

[01:13:59] **HOWARD:** Just a group? You guys were probably a lot more active than most, right?

[01:14:03] **TONY:** What was that?

[01:14:03] **HOWARD:** Were you guys a little more active than most strikers?

[01:14:06] **ALL:** What? I don't know. A little more involved? No. Well, I don't know. We had a lot of them.

[01:14:10] **EDWARD:** There was what we called a hit-and-run type. Like Tony was saying, that if you caught somebody, you worked them over, you didn't linger. You done it in a hurry and leave in hurry. You done it in a hurry and you left in a hurry.

[01:14:22] **LEON:** You got out. Right now.

[01:14:25] **EDWARD:** Usually a few was picked up—

[01:14:27] **HOWARD:** So these were like scabs, or what you thought were scabs?

[01:14:29] **EDWARD:** Yeah, they were scabs!

[01:14:31] **HOWARD:** Oh, they were?

[01:14:32] **LEON:** We caught them red-handed! They were scabbing.

[01:14:35] **HOWARD:** So they left the boat, right? The Diamond Head—was that what it was called?

[01:14:39] **EDWARD:** The Diamond Head was down there.

[01:14:41] **LEON:** I'm glad the District Attorney is not here!

[01:14:45] **HOWARD:** I'm not using this to prosecute you guys here. I'll tell you why I'm concerned with this, because I think the '34 strike was—we all know—was very important in this union. And I think that the violence that took place and everything else in that period melded people together solidly for the next 30 year in that union. That's my impression.

[01:15:01] **TONY:** I think what helped us more than the '34 strike was the fact that we had a soup kitchen.

[01:15:05] **EDWARD:** That was the turning point in my life.

[01:15:08] **TONY:** The soup kitchen kept the people returning?

[01:15:10] **EDWARD:** I wouldn't have had a pot to turn loose in if it wouldn't have been for our strikes, and Harry Bridges, and the solidarity we had between our brothers who were working here.

[01:15:21] **HOWARD:** Now you guys had voted against the strike, originally, remember that?

[01:15:24] **LEON:** You got to remember one thing about union men. 90 percent of the men are for unions. Let's leave it and leave the cards on the table face-up. And when the people are in the position to be in need, the family says, 'The kids are hungry. You're going to do something.'

[01:15:42] **EDWARD:** Your wife would tell you, You're going down there and work.

[01:15:46] **LEON:** Anyhow, this is exactly what happens. And a lot of guys do something against their will because of their family. They can't do anything else. Or they're not going to have a family. And this deteriorates a union bunch of people. People who are union-minded. Because they just can't go on. If the kids need milk and the kids need food, and you haven't got any in the house and your wife says, 'Go to work,' and somebody tells you, you could have a job, your wife doesn't care whether you're a union man—some of them wouldn't care, some of them would. It depends on who they are. But you got to face the facts of life and again, here we again, huh? Every family is a little bit different. And I remember—well, I can bring this out. I remember the Rackwells. There was people by the name of Rackwell.

[01:16:39] **HOWARD:** Does he [John] want to be excused?

[01:16:42] **TONY:** Yeah, we ride together and we live in the Harbor City.

[01:16:46] **JOHN:** I got the dog locked up in the house. I figure I ought to go home.

[01:16:50] **TONY:** He's got a wife who's in the hospital, see.

[01:16:51] **HOWARD:** Oh ok.

[01:16:53] **LEON:** Eddie, what was that dock boss's name on [?Look Um Back Station?] ? Who was pink?

[01:16:54] **EDWARD:** Well, you had five or six of them. The scab?

[01:17:01] **LEON:** The fighter.

[01:17:02] **TONY:** Oh, you mean Tony?

[01:17:03] **LEON:** Tony! Push Him Up Tony. That's it, that's it.

[01:17:08] **EDWARD:** Push-Him-Up Tony and Petrob!

[01:17:10] **LEON:** That's it. Petrob! P-E-T-R-O-B.

[01:17:14] **TONY:** Yeah, Petrob. His brother Pete—his son Pete finally became a union and a business agent.

[01:17:19] **LEON:** Yeah, that's right.

[01:17:20] **TONY:** Bye, take it easy.

[01:17:23] **OTHERS:** Goodbye, Tony!

[01:17:25] **HOWARD:** And I may come back again and we could talk again.

[01:17:32] **EDWARD:** And I know this is just a full question and a lot could be said either way, but the '34 strike was the turning point in our history on the waterfront.

[01:17:40] **LEON:** That's exactly right.

[01:17:41] **EDWARD:** And we had to have solidarity and help. [inaudible] _____ to come in here [inaudible] _____.

[01:17:47] **HOWARD:** I may talk to you about that sometime.

[01:17:48] **EDWARD:** Okay.

[01:17:49] **HOWARD:** Okay. Thanks a lot, bye. We're down to the hard core here.

[01:17:55] **LEON:** Well, like I say, the '34 strike was a value to the majority of us. None of us had anything. It was during the Depression. People were in want. People—everybody needed something. It was nothing to come

on the waterfront. You'd get a week's pay, six dollars a week, I can show you the time books—six dollars for a whole week's worth of work. Then eight dollars and some weeks nothing.

[01:18:18] **TONY:** You better believe it. And some weeks nothing.

[01:18:21] **HOWARD:** Why did you guys vote against the original proposal to strike? Do you remember doing that?

[01:18:26] **TONY:** Well they wanted the steady men.

[01:18:29] **LEON:** What do you mean the steady men? How are you phrasing that?

[01:18:29] **HOWARD:** Well in '33, when the proposal was made to go on strike, all the ports went for it except L.A.

[01:18:41] **LEON:** Oh, well like you said before, it wasn't much a union at the time. And those that were in knowledge of it were afraid of losing their jobs. But then later it came down—when they came down with a proposal—like I tell you, the younger guys, like myself at that time had gangs. We didn't have what they called an overhaul gang. An overhaul gang was the one that hoist the cargo from the dock over the top. We went through the port. See I wasn't a winch driver or a hatch tender. All right, so incidentally, you're talking to the two youngest men in the harbor—he was the youngest winch driver in the harbor and I was the youngest hatch driver in the harbor!

[01:19:19] **TONY:** I was the youngest winch driver.

[01:19:20] **HOWARD:** How old were you?

[01:19:20] **LEON:** How old are you Tony, come on?

[01:19:23] **TONY:** Seventy, now.

[01:19:24] **LEON:** Are you that old?

[01:19:26] **HOWARD:** Are you 70?

[01:19:26] **TONY:** Seventy.

[01:19:27] **HOWARD:** You look much younger than that. All you guys do.

[01:19:29] **LEON:** I'm 68. I'll be 69—

[01:19:32] **TONY:** I'm 70 years old.

[01:19:33] **LEON:** So anyhow, I was the youngest hatch driver—

[01:19:38] **TONY:** Yeah, and I was the youngest winch driver.

[01:19:40] **HOWARD:** How old about were you? You're 70 now so we're going back in '34. We're going back forty-seven years, right?

[01:19:47] **TONY:** I would work for a guy that nobody would work for. An old man, grumpy, [? Boot Nose?] Davis. Nobody—he would never leave the rail and he taught me how to drive winches from the rail. And I used to go up there and learn how to ride winches right after the '34 strike and play with them. In fact, in '33, I used to do that. Go up there and play with them winches. When the guys were eating during lunch hour, and even in the evening when everybody was leaving, before they shut down the motors I'd go up there and practice. Most of them were all steam jobs. And then I got into the electrics, double electrics. And then I got into the single winches which you had a two men to drive those. And I started with one winch, see how they feel. Feel alright—this is what I learned. I watched every move that a man would make on winches—he'd think I wasn't looking at them, I was watching! Watching every little trick that he did on that lever. How they would swing and how they chop; I was watching, every time.

[01:21:00] **LEON:** The way I started mine, I had a gang; I was one of the gang leaders, one of the bosses of the gang. Anyhow, during meal hour, they'd relieve the gang. So one day, Larry Powers—the one that you were talking about—he'd come up, and he'd drive the winches—see that shows you, we had no union then. See, I mean the boss is driving. The boss would say, 'Okay, your gang can back out, overhaul gear, be back between eleven and twelve.' Or twelve and one. We usually between twelve and one, and they'd send the gang to eat and we'd keep it going for an hour. And Larry Powers would come up and drive winch and I'd drive hatch, you know. I'd tend hatch for him. So one day, the way it started out—and it was on the Malone. I'd never forget that god darn ship. I'll never forget that dirty son-of-a-gun. I'm telling you, this is true. I got up on there, and Larry was in a crab gate [relating to hand winches] —we used to have [?Astle Way?] gangs on the docks. It was nothing to see a couple 300 dollars, even in those days in the gang. A whole guy's paycheck would be gone. There would be guys that wouldn't bring home any money for a month sometime.

[01:22:09] **TONY:** The wives would come down and go to the employers—this is true! And get their checks before they'd go down and spend it. That's the gospel truth.

[01:22:16] **LEON:** Just to—it was a sickness, more or less. Just a gambling sickness. Anyhow, Larry was stuck. So I'm hollering at him, "Hey! Come on up!" And he hollered back up the ship, he looked at me and says, "You drive those winches!" And I says, "I can't drive those winches!"

[01:22:36] **HOWARD:** You learned.

[01:22:37] **LEON:** He says, "You either drive them, or else!" And Alec Bolton was in that hatch and Allie gave me a hell of a hard time to go. I went up on the goddamn ship and I says, "Fellows, I'm the hatch,"—and we were loading cement. And I'm telling you, those winches, and you just touch them you just [makes whooshing sound]—steam winches! Oh they were the fastest steam winches around, and wham! I come in with the first

eight loads of cement. When I got down to the bottom of the hold, the boys were either broke or they were drunk. I had a regular crack house down there. It was one hell of a mess! And you know—

[01:23:13] **HOWARD:** On the job training.

[01:23:14] **LEON:** You know, boom they'd go again! You try to stop them, and they stopped so quick, you're going so fast, the board would just break. The cement would fall, you know.

[01:23:25] **TONY:** The winches he's talking about, those boards that he's talking about used to carry 72 bags of cement!

[01:23:33] **LEON:** And they were outlawed.

[01:23:34] **HOWARD:** How many tons or how many pounds is that?

[01:23:36] **TONY:** A hundred pounds apiece. Ninety-eight pounds.

[01:23:39] **HOWARD:** You're talking 7200 pounds a load?

[01:23:41] **TONY:** A load!

[01:23:42] **HOWARD:** Oh wow.

[01:23:43] **LEON:** We put 4,000 pounds on a load.

[01:23:46] **TONY:** Whew, man! 72 bags.

[01:23:48] **HOWARD:** This was before '34 you were putting this kind of stuff on there?

[01:23:51] **LEON:** Oh yeah. Even after we were—

[01:23:52] **HOWARD:** So 4,000 pound loads in [inaudible] _____ cement.

[01:23:55] **LEON:** Even after we went back to work after the '34 strike, until we got in to made rules!

[01:24:00] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you about that period, because that's another thing I want to talk about.

[01:24:03] **LEON:** I was the chairman of those rules.

[01:24:04] **HOWARD:** You were? What happened—what was it like to come back—

[01:24:13] **LEON:** Not the '34 strike—

[BREAK IN RECORDING OF INTERVIEW]

[01:24:13] **HOWARD:** Tell me what it was like to come back out on the waterfront after the '34 strike. Had things changed? Had the work change? Had the relationships with supervisors changed?

[01:24:21] **LEON:** No, the work hadn't changed. The bosses didn't know exactly where they stood [pause] with us. They weren't quite sure. They tried to push us as much as possible and we were reluctant in getting pushed. Like we were previous to that. And gradually we got rules into the ILA at that time. And then the ILWU. And we got rules. And in the rules, some of the rules were to—so many pounds to a load and the safety part of it—it was all a safety factor more or less. And all I can is, first, when we first came back things of the status quo, we had nothing, nobody had anything organized or set up.

[01:25:04] **HOWARD:** The work hadn't changed when you came back?

[01:25:07] **LEON:** Just the fact that we wouldn't be pushed by the boss like we were previously. We had freedom.

[01:25:11] **HOWARD:** That was a change, right?

[01:25:12] **LEON:** That was the change. Then, later on, the Rules Committees started putting up rules and negotiating with the employer and the employer agreeing to the amount of load limits and etcetera, and safety factors. And this is what took place.

[01:25:26] **HOWARD:** What about the work stoppages that took place from about '34 to '37?

[01:25:30] **LEON:** Well, the work stoppages would stop if somebody—oh, well there would be several reasons for it. Perhaps we'd be accused of doing something we weren't supposed to have been accused of. We'd hold our own on it by stopping work and the rest of us would back us up. If something was unsafe, work stoppages usually came out on that heading, more or less. Like for instance, we'd assume the loads were too big and we didn't want to pump them out because they were a hazard. The gear might break—that is, the rigging of the ship would only tolerate so much weight.

[01:26:07] **HOWARD:** Did you ever see these work stoppages as an attempt to sort of control your own work process—do you know what I mean by that? Because up to this time, the employers pretty much dictated the size of the load, how fast it was going to be swung in and dropped into the hole and everything else.

[01:26:21] **LEON:** The employer never stopped us for speed. That, he never stopped us, he tried to get more speed out of you.

[01:26:25] **HOWARD:** Yeah, but you guys were able to go on work stoppages or engage in slow-downs or whatever it was—could this sort of be an attempt to control the work that you were doing?

[01:26:36] **LEON:** Oh yeah, sure. Sure.

[01:26:38] **HOWARD:** That's what it was?

[01:26:38] **LEON:** It was a safety factor. Ninety percent of this work stoppage was safety factors. Like for instance, say that you were talking about working a single winch. In other words, we had what we called Johnson-Beyer winches—they were annoying. All right, and you take one man on each winch because the levers worked together and you couldn't control them. The [?centrics?] didn't work the same, in other words, you had to through the centric in to get in one direction and throw it the other way to get in the other direction. The same steam valve would do that job but the [?centric?] would throw it into gear and reverse it. Well, you couldn't possibly do that, you know, with just two hands so they made winches that had sleeve valves in them and the sleeve valves would allow the inside valve to allow the steam in and other one to exhaust it. So there would be one valve inside of another valve and soon they had the piston in the middle. The piston was the one that created the power of the pressure of the steam. So we'll assume that he had that single winch and he's sitting there. And here we say we got a fall, which is a runner, a runner which is a cable. Okay, I'll define it. The cable runs through a [?gin?] block at the top of the boom, comes back down and goes through heel block. And usually this heel block would be behind the winch driver.

[01:27:53] **TONY:** Right behind his head.

[01:27:54] **LEON:** And if it would break, it would snap his head off. So we demand a safety strap on them.

[01:27:58] **TONY:** And it did kill a man.

[01:28:06] **LEON:** Anyhow—

[01:28:07] **HOWARD:** So they were basically safety questions.

[01:28:09] **LEON:** It was a safety thing. And the employer would back off, you know, try to avoid doing it, just to try to pull his own. And we'd insist on it.

[01:28:17] **HOWARD:** I guess there's a fine line between safety and speed-up right? I mean some of them also opposed the speed up, weren't they?

[01:28:22] **LEON:** Oh yeah. But you created your own speed after the '34 strike.

[01:28:27] **HOWARD:** That's what I wanted to ask you about, what do you mean by that?

[01:28:29] **LEON:** In other words, nobody pushed you as far as speed was concerned, but if you didn't get the speed, you didn't get the good hatches. And the good hatches meant the abundance of work and the easiest of work. And the best places to work on the ship.

[01:28:42] **HOWARD:** But you felt that—did many have greater control—let me ask you—did they have great control over the work process after the '34? The men working.

[01:28:50] **TONY:** Oh yes. Yeah, sure.

[01:28:52] **HOWARD:** And you got that principally by engaging in these work stoppages?

[01:28:56] **LEON:** Oh yeah, sure. Say, the bosses would come and make some remark, say, "You better speed this gang up. This gang's—number three is doing more than number four is." Or you know number four hatch, excuse me. And you'd come up and say, "So what?" But before that you'd try to catch him. Before the strike. In other words, he'd work one gang against another. He'd tell you lies, because they weren't doing any more than what you were. And he'd go back and tell them we were beating them! And you know the first thing you know, the hooks would be flying! And the men were sweating. I mean really, really sweating.

[01:29:35] **HOWARD:** You know, things were real different after '34 then, I take it? I don't want to exaggerate the difference.

[01:29:39] **LEON:** Yes, it was considered very different.

[01:29:41] **TONY:** Much, much different than in the Fink Hall days.

[01:29:44] **HOWARD:** Why don't you tell me your impressions of how they changed. Or work itself changed.

[01:29:48] **TONY:** Well the loads changed. The attitude of the men changed. We had better harmony all the way through.

[01:29:55] **HOWARD:** Can you think of any specific instances where a foreman tried to push something on you and the men said no?

[01:30:01] **TONY:** The men just turned around and set their own pace. They set their own pace.

[01:30:08] **HOWARD:** Do you have any specific incidents like maybe you working and some guy came up to you and tried to mouth off, and you guys—

[01:30:14] **TONY:** And even if a boss shot his mouth off, and you know you're cutting it, you just maintain your pace. And ignore him.

[01:30:24] **LEON:** [inaudible] _____. Like the gang I used to drive for, I think got more number three hatches than any guy in the port.

[01:30:31] **HOWARD:** Are those good or bad?

[01:30:34] **LEON:** Worst actions in the world, the work.

[01:30:34] **HOWARD:** Why were you getting them?

[01:30:36] **LEON:** Because bum-eyed men in the hold—I had nothing but gas pipes down there.

[01:30:42] **HOWARD:** What does that mean?

[01:30:43] **TONY:** They drank, they drank.

[01:30:44] **OUTSIDE INTERRUPTION:** Let us know when you leave.

[01:30:45] **HOWARD:** What time do you want us out?

[01:30:51] **OUTSIDE VOICE:** No time. We close at 4:30.

[BREAK]

[01:31:13] **TONY:** This is after the '34 strike. The dock men were—

[END PART THREE/BEGIN PART FOUR]

[01:31:22] **LEON:** --to the dock, the company was pay 65 cents an hour, the Marine Service Bureau. Ten cents of the money went for the insurance, that's why you only got 55 cents. And that—they were picking up their dime on everybody's working hours. And they did that on the ship as well, you got 10 cents more on the ship. I told you I had a ship—ship gang, a port gang. It wasn't called a ship gang it was called a port gang. I've got that port gang on the dock because I wasn't capable of driving the winches.

But then I passed the winch driver's committee because I had learned, like I told you the first time what happened. After that, I got to the point where I was able to drive them. Then I drove others on the Corrales—we had a ship called the Corrales. We hoisted sugar up on the second floor. I remember that. And hoist that stuff up there and you know, got some good experience, because you're down there on the ship and man, you're pulling them loads up way the heck up, going up on the slings and what have you. Manning them, and you don't dump too many up there. Because they've got to come down on that net. That's on the second floor. We're going direct from the lower hold of the ship to the second deck—the second story on the dock. [inaudible] _____.

[01:32:31] **TONY:** The orange stacks ships that you talking about—wasn't that the Blue Star?

[01:32:36] **LEON:** No that was Corrales. Corrales belonged to the Los Angeles Steamship Company.

[01:32:40] **TONY:** The blue—I mean the orange stacks?

[01:32:43] **LEON:** Oh, the P&O Boats?

[01:32:46] **TONY:** That's it. P&O Boats.

[01:32:49] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a question about the '34 strike. Did you have any impressions of Bridges during that? He was of course in San Francisco and was not an international rep at all. But did you ever hear of him in '34? Do you remember?

[01:33:00] **LEON:** Not too much in previous strikes.

[01:33:02] **TONY:** He was still in the ILA then. Because Pedro Pete and those guys in the Dirty Dozen they were controlling us down here.

[01:33:08] **HOWARD:** Now, who were the guys that lined up in the Dirty Dozen? What were their characteristics? Were they the old-timers?

[01:33:13] **LEON:** Well, there was— [inaudible] _____ Green was one. I'm trying to think—I'm trying to think of these names—

[01:33:16] **TONY:** [?Beebo?] was in it.

[01:33:16] **LEON:** Yeah, Beebo and there was [?Red Suret?] .

[01:33:28] **HOWARD:** Was there anything in common with these guys? In other words—

[01:33:31] **LEON:** Patterson.

[01:33:32] **TONY:** Patterson was the president of the Dirty Dozen.

[01:33:37] **LEON:** What's that?

[01:33:37] **HOWARD:** Were they older guys or younger guys?

[01:33:39] **LEON:** Older. All older men.

[01:33:39] **TONY:** All older guys.

[01:33:41] **HOWARD:** Were they guys that probably scabbed in '23? Or not necessarily?

[01:33:45] **LEON:** Suret did. I don't know about the others.

[01:33:45] **TONY:** I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

[01:33:46] **LEON:** Do you think I can remember, Tony, is the—

[OUTSIDE INTERRUPTION]

[01:33:57] **HOWARD:** So I was asking about Bridges I think. Did you know anything about him?

[01:34:01] **TONY:** Not at that time. Not that much.

[01:34:04] **HOWARD:** Oh, I was talking about the Dirty Dozen, were they older men?

[01:34:07] **TONY:** Older men.

[01:34:07] **LEON:** Not all of them. There's a couple of younger—well I would say—well we would call them older because they were 35 years old.

[01:34:13] **HOWARD:** Was it literally a dozen or was it sort of—

[01:34:15] **TONY:** No, they were a dozen.

[01:34:17] **HOWARD:** There were twelve of them?

[01:34:18] **LEON:** I can't remember—what was the business agent's name that got sucked into that?

[01:34:28] **TONY:** Edmundson.

[01:34:28] **LEON:** Edmundson. I couldn't think of that name for the last 30 years.

[01:34:30] **HOWARD:** And they were ILA supporters, basically.

[01:34:32] **LEON:** Yeah, they called on Pedro Pete. We called him Pedro Pete. And they were Pedro Pete's right-hand men. And whatever he said they did. And they—got in the—a few of them did. Like this one here, I'm talking about, Edmunson, he was a fine guy. No squabbles about that guy. He was 100 percent union, everything was—I don't know how anything went wrong with him.

[01:34:55] **HOWARD:** Why would he have followed them, do you have any idea?

[01:34:57] **LEON:** Because he thought it was the right thing to do. He really did. I mean this is it. Because we talked to him after.

[01:35:04] **TONY:** A that particular time, that Frenchie is talking to him about another group, but also tried to form a united front, if you remember, which was L.B. Thomas, Jimmy [?Houten?] .

[01:35:17] **LEON:** Now they came from—it was Jimmy out in the middle and they had this fighter come from New York that was trying to the ILA back together again—Jimmy Slatterman. Geez, we've got bad memories.

[01:35:29] **TONY:** Yeah, Jimmy Slatterman. Yeah, I mean you know, you're going back quite a few years, pal.

[01:35:38] **LEON:** Forty years, you know.

[01:35:39] **TONY:** Yeah, you're digging way back there.

[01:35:42] **HOWARD:** Alright let's move a little more recently then. So we've covered '34, we've talked about the work stoppages after '34 and the feeling is you've got much greater control. Now we're moving into the Second World War. Were you both working on the waterfront during the war? And you were too?

[01:35:57] **LEON:** Yes, I was a foreman.

[01:35:58] **HOWARD:** You were? Did the work change at all during the war? In a sense that did that sling laws change? Did the speedup take place? Anything at all like that?

[01:36:08] **LEON:** There was no speedup but everybody threw out the working rules.

[01:36:11] **HOWARD:** They did?

[01:36:12] **LEON:** Yeah, we threw out the working rules [pause] for the benefit of the war. Now this is where I'll come in as the chairman of that committee—in a few minutes.

[01:36:25] **HOWARD:** Why don't you explain what that means?

[01:36:27] **LEON:** What's that?

[01:36:27] **HOWARD:** Throwing out the work rules.

[01:36:29] **LEON:** Well we just discarded all the rules. And just used common sense.

[01:36:32] **HOWARD:** Who's we?

[01:36:34] **LEON:** The foreman, because 90 percent of the guys were in the service anyhow. All of them were good, hardworking men were either the Seabees [U.S. Naval Construction Forces] or the service.

[01:36:43] **HOWARD:** Ninety percent literally? Or is that—

[01:36:44] **LEON:** Well, that's just a rough figure. Say 70 percent and I'm hitting it pretty close.

[01:36:48] **HOWARD:** So you think 70 percent of the men were in the service? In Local 13.

[01:36:54] **LEON:** Well, no I'll take that back, let's say 50 percent and I'll tell you why. I'll be trying to get some recollection here.

[01:37:00] **HOWARD:** Because I've been trying to figures on this.

[01:37:01] **LEON:** It was 50 percent that was probably in the service. And we'll say maybe another 15 percent left the ship and went to work on the dock. Left us no hold men.

[01:37:13] **HOWARD:** Oh they went from the hold to the dock?

[01:37:15] **LEON:** It was easier. And they were elderly men, more or less. So what we wound up getting is the new recruits.

[01:37:23] **HOWARD:** In the hold at least, then?

[01:37:24] **LEON:** And guys like myself, and Tony—he was a foreman too—we did the work actually. Lining up the blocks, putting in the bull lines—all kinds of stuff, really hustling. Really hustling to get those ships loaded so that they'd go up the convoy.

[01:37:40] **HOWARD:** Did you guys have deferments as longshoremen?

[01:37:42] **LEON:** What's that?

[01:37:42] **HOWARD:** Did you have occupational deferments as longshoremen, or do you remember?

[01:37:46] **LEON:** Well I was deferred at the start of it.

[01:37:48] **HOWARD:** For what reason?

[01:37:49] **LEON:** For this reason.

[01:37:50] **HOWARD:** Because you were a critical worker? Is that it?

[01:37:54] **LEON:** Yes, well I was needed.

[01:37:54] **HOWARD:** You were a key worker? And how about you?

[01:37:55] **TONY:** I was a—I wasn't deferred at first, because they picked out—the FBI came down and picked up five winch drivers out of this port. And I happened to be one of them. And Gordon Wells, Bill Christenson, Frank Elliot, and there was one more guy and I can't figure out who that was. So there was five of us that was picked out. We can drive and take a ship with no booms or nothing on it and start from scratch and put her together and set her up, all jumbles, all heavy-lift gear. We could go ahead and put the ship together. Nothing on it. And we can get that ship working in no time and start loading and discharging. But if we refuse, they would've put us on a—we would've been automatically in. So I was working—I was ship bossing for Matson at that time, and they took me and us five guys—fifteen out of San Francisco and five out of Seattle. And there was twenty-five of us that went on this deal. It was an invasion in the North Pacific, in the Aleutian Islands. We made that invasion.

[01:39:22] **HOWARD:** And you were working with military personnel?

[01:39:24] **TONY:** Military personnel was the engineers and working on the halls. And we rigged the ships. We rigged them and discharged.

[01:39:33] **HOWARD:** How long were you doing that?

[01:39:34] **TONY:** We were up there four months and eighteen days.

[01:39:37] **HOWARD:** So that was the only time you left the waterfront?

[01:39:39] **TONY:** We were an invasion, we went on zero hour. We went right in. Right in.

[01:39:43] **HOWARD:** Why did they select you?

[01:39:45] **TONY:** Well they didn't have no—the Seabees, they were set ashore, setting up and discharging their ships. They didn't have enough men to go around. So they picked us fellows to go ahead and take care of this particular invasion.

[01:40:00] **HOWARD:** You must have been real good work at your work.

[01:40:04] **TONY:** Well we knew how to—well you're the boss, you know everything about the ship.

[01:40:08] **LEON:** You better believe it or you're not the boss.

[01:40:10] **TONY:** You're not the boss. Because we know.

[01:40:13] **HOWARD:** So you were overseas then for about four or five months. Otherwise you were here working out of Local 13?

[01:40:19] **TONY:** Yeah, 94. Then we—

[01:40:23] **HOWARD:** Local 94?

[01:40:24] **TONY:** Yeah, that's the foremen's union. Same thing. This is another local right here. Then when we come back, I went back to Matson and from Matson, Matson elevated me into superintendent to operate [?Long Beach?] Stevedore Company or operations. Which they had a lot of paperwork—Matson did. And then just before the war was racking up, I see the company is going to fold up, then I went with Pacific [inaudible] _____, and I was operating superintendent there.

[01:41:00] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a question about a comment you made earlier that—throughout the working groups. Was there any opposition to that among the men that you can think of?

[01:41:09] **LEON:** Oh no, there was no men there at all. Nobody opposed it.

[01:41:12] **TONY:** Nobody.

[01:41:13] **LEON:** Nobody opposed it. We had no problems at all and we did it all—

[01:41:16] **TONY:** No, we were at war.

[01:41:16] **LEON:** Let's face the facts of life, we knew what was right and what was wrong and we didn't go overboard. Occasionally—occasionally, we'd take a stab at something that wasn't quite right.

[01:41:29] **HOWARD:** Like what? Can you give me an instance of that?

[01:41:30] **LEON:** Well, taking a heavy lift and putting it in the wing. And let's say you can pull it up—you can pull the ship side in a little bit, and put too much strain in the wires and then—well, I don't know if I should tell him about the four-on, four-off. This is when it started.

[01:41:45] **HOWARD:** I know about the four-on, four-off.

[01:41:47] **LEON:** You know about it?

[01:41:48] **HOWARD:** Now do you think it originated during the war?

[01:41:50] **LEON:** It originated right there.

[01:41:50] **HOWARD:** There seems to be a lot of controversy about it.

[01:41:52] **LEON:** Like I was the foreman of the ship, I would go down to the hall—it has eight men down there. And eight men that didn't know what they were doing. They were recruited, because the good men were in the Service again. Or, you know, or out in the dock. The older men. The older men didn't want to work with this younger group, because you know, they just didn't want to work or didn't know how to work. So that left the bosses with a whole lot of people that didn't know too much. Let's face it. So here we are trying to put up the Lorain cranes in the wings, or we're trying put on something extremely heavy, you know, we're talking 40 tons, 45 tons.

[01:42:25] **TONY:** Like those Sherman Tanks. You would put them in the wing, you didn't drive them.

[01:42:28] **LEON:** You didn't drive them. The army would not let you break the track. And [inaudible] _____ we had to drag them in.

[01:42:34] **HOWARD:** So, you had a bunch of inexperienced guys in the hall, stowing very complicated pieces of cargo.

[01:42:41] **LEON:** And then they'd bring it on the barge, or the jumbo bones on the ships, it would be the Number Two Hatch, usually. But with the rest of the places they'd come in with the barge and put it in because it's too heavy to bring in with the regular gear. The ship's rigging in other words. So they use outside rigging which is a barge. Or a crane from the dock. Most of the time barges. Anyhow, we bring this stuff on board and put the two by twelves down, and grease the devil out of the with mutton tallow. Just plain old mutton tallow. And slide them in the wing!

[01:43:11] **HOWARD:** So how did the four-on, four-off system originate?

[01:43:14] **LEON:** All right. Now you had eight men and you'd say, "Hey, get out of the way." The foreman were responsible for this. I'm one of them. I'm one of the men responsible for this. I just turn around and say, "Get out of the way. You get four guys sit there for a while."

[01:43:29] **HOWARD:** Is that right? So it was a question of like, making room for—

[01:43:32] **LEON:** Safety.

[01:43:32] **TONY:** For safety purposes because they were in the way.

[01:43:34] **LEON:** For safety because you know they can go and get their necks broke! Or their legs broke.

[01:43:36] **TONY:** That wire snaps. The guy—if that wire was snapped, you'd wipe out a foreman because he's right at the bite of the wire.

[01:43:44] **LEON:** He's the guy, and he's got to look out for himself, not four other guys.

[01:43:47] **HOWARD:** So why don't you explain this a little better to me, because I've never been in the hall of a ship.

So you're lowering—go ahead.

[01:43:52] **LEON:** Let's assume this is the hold of the ship. And we're going to say that's the opening right here. Now we got to get back on the wings, this is the wings. And this is under the coleman forward and under coleman aft of the ship. So you bring in the crane you can't bring it under the coleman, it had to be put in the square. So now we got tractors down there—

[01:44:12] **HOWARD:** Oh okay, so if it lands in the middle, it's sliding off to the side, right?

[01:44:15] **LEON:** If they had tractors. But we didn't have the drivers either, you know? Because only so many men come out. So, they give us bull lines, in other words, big heavy wires. We stripped the gear, and put in halliards [hoisting lines] in the gear so that we can pull the wires through again, because we couldn't drag it on there, we'd have to use the wires on the coleman blocks.

In other words, say the wire that would normally be on this winch would go up through a gin block, come back down and then hook over there with two on each side, so that's a murray gear. We would take a halliard or a piece of line to you and pull it through and pull that wire through. In other words, sew it back in so we can pull it back in again. Take it, out bring it over and put it on the hatch coleman. And on that hatch coleman—say this is the opening—we'd have a block and attach a block and a strap and shackles to hold it together on the on pallets or around stanchions—any place where we can secure it. And then we'd go ahead and run those wire in the hold, in the coleman, down the colemans, so when we pull with the winches we're pulling on these blocks only. Now, we've got to leave those wires into the wing. There's a coleman block over here, and another one here. So we'll say we want pull thing in the wing, and say this is the plane. That means now we've got to go through the blocks and connect these wires together. Then we got to pull it. You pull on one—you turn a little bit—you pull on the other. Now, if that wire breaks, and you got eight men around, you'll wipe them out.

[01:45:44] **TONY:** You'll kill them.

[01:45:45] **HOWARD:** Now, the reason you'd wipe them out—well why wasn't that a problem before the war?

[01:45:49] **LEON:** Because we didn't use a heavy lifts.

[01:45:50] **TONY:** You didn't use heavy lifts.

[01:45:51] **HOWARD:** Ok, so the size of the load was what made the difference, right? Because you've got these big loads and they were very dangerous. And so if you had eight men in a hall, it was just too congested to be safe.

[01:46:02] **LEON:** That's the answer.

[01:46:03] **HOWARD:** Okay, so that's how the four-on, four-off originates?

[01:46:06] **LEON:** More or less.

[01:46:07] **HOWARD:** Now, somebody said the employers pretty much initiated it, because during the war, they were being compensated by the number of people they had working. And it was in their interest to sort of look the other way and have guys standing around a lot.

[01:46:18] **LEON:** Well, that happened in the docks and various other places but it didn't happen in the ship—

[01:46:21] **HOWARD:** Not in the holds though.

[01:46:22] **LEON:** The gangs on the ship—I'll tell you what might happen. On lashing gangs say that you needed 10 lashes, to lash everything on the deck load and the employer ordered 15. Well there was five. He'd get compensated for the 15, but the thing is to the employer was looking out for himself and at least five of those guys might be drunk. [knocks on the table]

[01:46:44] **HOWARD:** Yeah, that's interesting.

[01:46:44] **LEON:** Oh yeah, I mean there was a reason for it. The employer don't throw money away. Again, he made money if everybody was in—

[01:46:52] **HOWARD:** It sounds like—well, I don't know. Was work actually harder during the war? Or less demanding?

[01:46:58] **TONY:** There was different type of work.

[01:46:59] **LEON:** Different type of work.

[01:46:59] **TONY:** Always a different type.

[01:47:00] **HOWARD:** What does that mean?

[01:47:00] **TONY:** It was all on heavy lifts. Most the heavy stuff.

[01:47:05] **HOWARD:** So it wasn't real speed-up sort of stuff at all because you had to handle these things very carefully.

[01:47:09] **TONY:** Oh no, it was very cautious. You had to be very, very cautious with this stuff.

[01:47:12] **HOWARD:** So the pace of the work was probably a little slower, is that correct?

[01:47:14] **LEON:** Would you want to send a tank over there, or a truck over there with wheels off?

[01:47:18] **HOWARD:** No, no.

[01:47:18] **LEON:** You want to use it when you get there.

[01:47:20] **HOWARD:** Okay, let me tell you the reason why I'm asking you all these questions, is because have you read a book by Charles Larrowe on Harry Bridges?

[01:47:26] **TONY:** Yeah.

[01:47:26] **HOWARD:** Did you see that thing?

[01:47:27] **LEON:** Yeah.

[01:47:28] **HOWARD:** It got a little part where he comes to Los Angeles and Bridges a meeting of longshoremen during the war and says, "Well, fellows we got to stop—we got to lift the sling load limits on cement. We got to really speed up. We got to make our instrument—our union an instrument of the speed up." And someone gets up—Gordon told me who it was, I forget now—and said, "Get out of your red, white and blue pajamas, Harry. Go back and shove it, we're not interested in that." Now you're telling me that—see I guess what I don't understand is you said that the men pretty much voluntarily gave up the work rules during the war.

[01:47:58] **LEON:** We gave them up.

[01:47:59] **HOWARD:** You gave them up.

[01:48:00] **LEON:** Because of one more reason.

[01:48:01] **HOWARD:** Why?

[01:48:03] **LEON:** Some of those men could be drafted. [laughs]

[01:48:05] **HOWARD:** What do you mean? How does that follow? I don't get that.

[01:48:08] **LEON:** You better not squawk too much 'cause you'd be in the army. [laughing]

[01:48:12] **HOWARD:** Oh, I see. So that sort of dampened any protest, huh?

[01:48:17] **LEON:** Well you asked it, so I'm telling you. [laughing]

[01:48:19] **TONY:** Now you wanted to know how many loads that Jim was just talking to you about, we had prisoners of war here. And we made them put on the big loads on cements in the hatches. Boards. They used the prisoners, the dagos [ethnic slur for Italians] to load the cement.

[01:48:37] **HOWARD:** Who were actually the prisoners of war?

[01:48:38] **TONY:** Dagos.

[01:48:38] **LEON:** Italians. Do you know what dagos are?

[01:48:44] **HOWARD:** I wasn't sure I get that terminology. So the Italians? Actually from Mussolini?

[01:48:51] **LEON:** Oh, you better believe it. We used them.

[01:48:53] **HOWARD:** So there was that kind of shortage of labor?

[01:48:53] **LEON:** That's right. That's right.

[01:48:53] **TONY:** That's right. There's a couple of them in this union.

[01:48:53] **LEON:** Yeah, you better believe it. Became a citizen.

[01:48:54] **HOWARD:** Now, let me ask you before I forget. In '36, '37, there was a scrap iron incident in L.A. [tapping sound] , do you remember that? Any of you participate in that, either of you?

[01:49:11] **LEON:** We all loaded it.

[01:49:12] **TONY:** We all loaded it.

[01:49:13] **HOWARD:** You loaded scrap iron?

[01:49:14] **TONY:** Sure. We put [inaudible] _____ on the deck. On NYK [Nippon Yusen Kaisha] ships too.

[01:49:18] **HOWARD:** You did?

[01:49:18] **TONY:** You better believe it we did. We knew what was going on. I remember—

[01:49:23] **HOWARD:** Wasn't there a stoppage of work around that time, or refusal to load it at some point?

[01:49:26] **LEON:** Oh yeah.

[01:49:28] **TONY:** Sure.

[01:49:29] **HOWARD:** And what was your opinion of that? As rank-and-file longshoremen, did it matter to you a whole lot?

[01:49:34] **LEON:** Oh yeah it mattered to us because it was going to be thrown back to us eventually.

[01:49:39] **TONY:** Which it was. Pearl Harbor, now that's an incident.

[01:49:43] **LEON:** That's what Harry was talking about.

[OUTSIDE SOUND]

What's that? That's what Harry Bridges was talking about. And it's true.

[01:49:52] **HOWARD:** And I remember they tried to discipline about 27 men who participated in that and ILWU fought that tooth and nail on this harbor. I remember they sent them out to different gangs to disguise from being laid off, stuff like that. Remember anything else around that? I read quite a bit about it, I just—

[01:50:08] **LEON:** I remember, [to Tony] do you remember General?

[01:50:10] **TONY:** Yeah.

[01:50:11] **LEON:** General and I were pretty friendly, and he's an older man. And I always had a lot of respect for him. He was a man, at the age of 19 years old had a master's license on a square-rigged ship for unlimited shipping. At the age of 23 years old, he had unlimited tonnage license on a steam ship as master of the ship. In the Second World War, he had—I don't know how many German planes to his credit—he was a flyer, came back here and flew for TWA [Trans World Airlines] for about a year until his wife stopped him and came back on the waterfront.

[01:50:49] **TONY:** See you, [inaudible] _____.

[01:50:49] **LEON:** This man was an outstanding gentleman. I mean, his name was General. That was his real name!

[01:50:53] **TONY:** Yeah that's right. Outstanding general too.

[01:50:54] **LEON:** And he had a—what the hell was I going to say? Anyhow, I remember on the *Asama Maru*, [NYK ship] the Number Two Hatch, about 1939—right in there somewhere, '39—my gang was number 34, my gang. I'm up on the ship—and this is a true story, this is a fact. You want to work a work stoppage? Stop by, I'll show you how it was done sometimes, what people thought—different people.

Oh yeah, I started to say, General—he had a license as a port captain for every port but Puget Sound, on the Pacific Coast. He could go to any port, in and out. The Puget Sound, you can't take [soundings?] there because the bottom shifts all the time, and there's no way to hold that license unless you're there constantly. They keep changing. The waterways.

But anyhow, I'm on this ship, and I'm looking up and up the rigging, and something was missing. And I can't figure out what the hell it is. I'm just looking at this thing and it don't look right, you know? I'm looking at my rigging here and I'm going, I'm going crazy! I says, "What in the hell is missing on this ship?" I says, "Godammit!"

Finally, I'm walking back and forth and I'm looking at the gear. I'm walking behind, Eddie [?Ondo?] was there driving for me, and he says, "What the hell are you looking for?" I said, "I don't know. Something's wrong here, I don't know what it is." And he says, "What the hell is wrong? I don't see nothing wrong." And I said, "No, the shackles all look good. The gin box looks good. The runners look good." I even had him stop at the cable and run it up slow on the coleman and see if they were burnt, you know, fragile? Something wasn't—finally I looked up and I said, "Oh! That's what it is!" So I go down on the dock and I say to General—General never came on the ship, never went on the hall. Never went down to the hall to see what you were doing or whether you were screwing up or whether you were doing the job right. All the men respected him and they did the right thing by him. He never had to worry about—the men respected him. He was a hell of a man, believe me. I mean outstanding—and a gentleman too. Never cussed, didn't swear or didn't seem to drink any time. I mean a regular gentlemen. Anyhow, I go down there and I says, "Hey, Gen, notice something that's missing?" And he says, "What's that?" I said, "They're not flying the American flag." The courtesy flag.

[01:53:30] **TONY:** That's right. That's right, I remember that incident.

[01:53:32] **LEON:** And he says, "What're you talking about?" So we went up on the ship, I went back to the number two hatch--I remember I had Turnbull come up on that hatch and I told him. And I says, "You know what's missing, here it is?" I says, "Hell, we fly their courtesy flag when we go to their port." And I says, "They should fly ours." So he got the man down there, got the chief mate—chief-officer in other words. Chief-officer says, "Oh it's ripped." He says, "And it's soiled and dirty." And he [General] says, "It's never too dirty to put up. Or ripped enough where we won't warrant." He says, "We'll respect it. Put it up." So he turned around and he says, "We don't have it." He says, "The flag is—we just can't put it up." And he says, "Fine, then. If you don't work, then don't put it up. We don't work your ship."

[01:54:20] **HOWARD:** Now who's ship was this?

[01:54:21] **TONY:** NYK. The Japanese one.

[01:54:24] **LEON:** No, it was *Asama Maru*. Yeah. NYK. It belonged to the Japs. The Japanese ships. That's the name of the ship, *Asama Maru*. I don't forget it because I was the guy who was involved. And then so, I went up there, and he told the chief mate, the chief mate says, "Well I'll see the mast, I'll see the captain." And he went up to see the captain. And the captain went down on deck and he says, "When you put up the flag, we'll come back aboard your ship." He said to me, "Pass the word along. And when you get on the dock don't come back aboard the ship, and blow the whistle. Stay on the dock." So that's like passing—I mean in this waterfront is the mafia, you know? Nobody tells anybody. That's it. He says, "Hey, when the whistle blows, stay on the dock. Don't hit the gangways." "Why?" "You'll find out." We stayed on the dock until 3:30 in the afternoon, before they conceded and when they put that American flag up, it wasn't soiled, there wasn't a rip on it, it was just clean and brand new. But the Japs were trying to evade putting up their courtesy flag. And that was the *Asama Maru*. And we were loading hides up on that ship. Hides! Dirty, old hides in Number Two Hatch. You know, for leather. So there's an example.

Now, there's a guy that's a foreman and he was respected by every steamship company in this harbor. And he stopped the work. And they didn't question it either. And another thing, Mr. General would come out and say, "Oh, you guys keep it going and if something happens be sure to call the hospital or wherever." And he'd say, "I got to go and bring a ship in." He'd go out and bring in the Quaker Line Ship, do you remember?

[01:56:07] **TONY:** Yeah.

[01:56:09] **LEON:** Hell, he'd be on a payroll over here running this ship.

[01:56:13] **TONY:** [inaudible] _____ on all them ships.

[01:56:13] **LEON:** And he'd go out and bring the goddamn ships right into the harbor. And he'd come back to the job and say, "Is everything alright?" Then they wanted to fire him for it! But the employers wouldn't fire him, he was too valuable.

[01:56:26] **TONY:** I got to go.

[01:56:27] **HOWARD:** Okay, it's five o'clock, anyway.

[END PART FOUR]